

SETTLEMENTS AND STRONGHOLDS  
IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

STUDIES IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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# Settlements and Strongholds in Early Medieval England

*Texts, Landscapes, and Material Culture*

*by*

MICHAEL D. J. BINTLEY

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## Abbreviations

AntJ	Antiquaries Journal
ArchJ	Archaeological Journal
ASE	Anglo-Saxon England
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
ASSAH	Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHR	English Historical Review
ELH	English Literary History
ES	English Studies
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
LSE	Leeds Studies in English
MÆ	Medium Aevum
MedArch	Medieval Archaeology
MLN	Modern Language Notes
Neophil	Neophilologus
NM	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
N&Q	Notes and Queries
OEHE	Old English Historia Ecclesiastica
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RES	Review of English Studies
YES	Yearbook of English Studies



## Abbreviations of Key Texts

<i>Andreas</i>	<i>Andreas: An Edition</i> , ed. by Richard North and Michael D. J. Bintley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016)
<i>The Battle of Brunanburh</i>	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems</i> , ed. by Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR, 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 16–20
<i>Beowulf</i>	<i>Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg</i> , ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4 <sup>th</sup> edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008)
<i>Cædmon's Hymn</i>	<i>Cædmon's Hymn: A Multi-Media Study, Edition and Archive</i> , ed. by Daniel Paul O'Donnell (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), p. 208
<i>Christ and Satan</i>	<i>The Junius Manuscript</i> , ed. by George P. Krapp, ASPR, 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 135–58
<i>Daniel</i>	<i>The Vercelli Book</i> , ed. by George P. Krapp, ASPR, 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 89–107
<i>De Excidio</i>	Gildas, <i>The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents</i> , ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom (Chichester: Phillimore, 2002)
<i>De Templo</i>	Bede, <i>Bedae Venerabilis Opera: Pars 2.2a, Opera Exegetica</i> , ed. by D. Hurst, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 119a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), pp. 141–224
<i>De gestis Britonum</i>	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain, an Edition and Translation of 'De gestis Britonum'</i> , ed. by Michael D. Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007)
<i>Guthlac A</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 111–39

<i>Guthlac B</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 140–59
<i>HE</i>	Bede, <i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)
<i>The Husband's Message</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 354–56
<i>Judith</i>	<i>Judith</i> , ed. by Mark Griffith (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997)
<i>Juliana</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 188–214
<i>The Ruin</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 357–58
<i>Seafarer</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 232–36
<i>Sermo Lupi ad Anglos</i>	Wulfstan, <i>The Homilies of Wulfstan</i> , ed. by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 261–75
<i>The Wanderer</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 215–19
<i>The Wife's Lament</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 328–30
<i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i>	<i>The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501</i> , ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 284

## Introduction: Texts and Landscapes in Early Medieval England

The second half of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the new millennium have seen considerable advances in our understanding of settlements in early medieval England, although many aspects of their development, character, and function have yet to be discovered. It is fair to say that these advances are primarily a result of the efforts of archaeologists and historians, rather than those who study the literature and other artistic productions of the period. Literary scholars, with a few exceptions, have done relatively little to aid our understanding of these 'inhabited spaces', as Nicole Guenther Discenza has recently described them.<sup>1</sup> This is partially due to the reluctance of those engaged with literary culture to engage with material culture to any great extent, though there remains considerable room for the development of dialogue in both directions. It is important that this conversation should continue to grow, as whilst the body of evidence from the material record will continue to expand, the corpus of texts, particularly in the case of Old English poetry, will not. To point this out is not to undermine the importance of new critical approaches to textual evidence, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which the wealth of material culture may further enrich the study of literature, and vice versa.

This book considers settlements and 'strongholds' represented in texts in the context of current archaeological and historical approaches. The argument advanced is based on the straightforward premise that the more we know about how these socially and culturally organized places were represented, the more likely we are to understand how ideas about them changed and developed over the course of the period. In practice this is a matter of knowing what archaeology and history have revealed about settlements so far and considering points of correlation and disconnection between them and their imaginatively reconstructed counterparts. This is not to say that there exists anything like a monolithic agreement amongst archaeologists and historians about the form and function of early medieval settlements. Nor is it to claim that matters of dating, authorship, provenance, analogues, influences, or doctrine (for example) are a settled matter amongst literary scholars. There are risks involved in placing too heavy a burden on a set of evidence from one field in order to support conclusions drawn in another; the selective use of material or textual evidence in this way, though not often deliberate, creates problems on all sides. There are doubtless places where some readers will feel the approach oversimplifies or obfuscates complex and difficult bodies of evidence, and there are doubtless places where future work

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<sup>1</sup> Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*.

will contradict my conclusions. Rather than robbing one discipline to pay another, my aim is to approach all these forms of evidence as 'modes of expression' which, as John Hines has argued, can be used to illustrate 'a deeper level of cultural structure and practice'.<sup>2</sup> The important point that I aim to make, perhaps above all else, is that there is deep and lasting value in pursuing this dialogue.

Following an outline of the argument, this introductory chapter proceeds by discussing the manner in which I have attempted to address and accommodate various issues, considering: the nature of the texts under discussion, their origins, and what they have to say about the dissemination of ideas; problems associated with periodization and chronology, particularly when it comes to discussing earlier landscapes through the lens of later texts; the approach to terminology; and the scholarly and theoretical underpinnings of this study.

The course of the argument is broadly chronological, for reasons discussed below. It begins in the well-trodden ground of the post-Roman period, following the collapse of the economy and associated infrastructure that contributed to the decline of town life in Britain. Though the towns are no longer thought to have been laid waste, and their inhabitants slaughtered, this was the story told by Gildas, and repeated by Bede, in such a way that this version of events was written into the origin mythologies of early medieval England, and reiterated throughout the period to suit various ends. Recognizing this establishes a new context for our understanding of the way that ruins and other lithic features of the landscape appear in Old English literature, where their grasp on literary culture has long been recognized. By contrast, those type-sites that have come to characterize our understanding of rural settlements in the early-Saxon period were free-form, dispersed, wandering, and wooden. They seldom appear prominently in Old English poetry, and when they do, it is often as idealized spaces that have more in common with the *locus amoenus* tradition than the realities of working agricultural villages.

The reintroduction of Roman Christianity to Britain marked the reintroduction of a living stone architectural system. Representatives of the Roman Church made a conscious attempt to reclaim what they thought of as the ruins of Roman Christendom, rebuilding using Roman stone, and occupying Roman sites. This approach to stone did not, however, exert any great influence upon secular building practices, and building in timber remained central to the architectural vernacular throughout the period. The seventh century saw the construction of some of the most magnificent hall buildings yet discovered, which have played a determining role in scholarly and popular understanding of their central ideological importance. These were not just structures of the earthly and physical realm, but also echoed the heights and limits of the universe itself. It was this conception of the cosmos that influenced Bede's structuring of the physical and spiritual world in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *De Templo*, and *In Genesim*. In these works the creation of the Temple, the universal Church, and the early Church in England offer a vivid impression of how Bede conceived of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical communities and settlements. The

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2 Hines, 'Literary Sources and Archaeology', p. 974.



mid-Saxon period saw the emergence of other important settlement types. One of these, the *wīc* (or *emporium*) of the mid-Saxon period, has received very little attention from literary scholars despite their significant presence in the archaeological record. This may be largely due to their absence from Old English texts. In my discussion of these settlements and the proto-burhs of the eighth century, I argue that no new poetic vocabulary emerged with which to describe these places because they could be comfortably accommodated within existing understandings of settlements and their relationship with structures of power.

The inception of the 'Viking Age', with its raids, invasions, and settlement, saw significant changes to the way that settlements were used, developed, and conceptualized. This did not take place overnight. Towns, and especially intramural spaces, had been undergoing a process of reimagining ever since St Augustine had processed into Canterbury and established an Episcopal seat there. In Chapter 4 I argue that the Old English *Andreas* illustrates a process of reclamation that had begun in the seventh century and continued throughout the eighth, becoming a matter of urgency in the late ninth. The burghal system devised at this time created a network of fortified places in the landscape, some of which became defended settlements in the tenth. The implementation of this system required as much ideological management as it did practical planning. The programme of prefaces, translations, and so on, for which the Alfredian circle shared some responsibility at this time, was as integral to the management of this initiative as the defences themselves. In addition to explaining the need for a balance of skilled individuals within a mutually supportive hierarchy, significant efforts were also made to explain the complex relationship between the king, his people, the land, and the places in which they lived.

Many of these innovations were not successful until some time after Alfred's reign (if at all), though his successors benefitted greatly from aspects of urban regeneration, including the newfound offensive potential of burhs. Works like *Judith* may owe their origins to this period, or at the very least their tenth-century popularity; in this poem, the Israelite city of Bethulia, threatened by Assyrians, is presented in terms that invite direct comparison with a burh besieged by an encamped viking army. The Old English works preserved in the four major poetic codices in the tenth century have much to tell us about what cities both real and imagined meant to their authors, and to those who recorded this poetry. These works, I argue, are an untapped source of potential for developing our understanding of urban places in late-Saxon England, as well as the relationship between powerful individuals and settlements on a much broader scale. My reading of this evidence is supported by the contemporary homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan, who drew upon the same Scriptural traditions as Bede and Alfred when they explained the part each Christian had to play in the fabric of the universal Church. Finally, in the poem *Durham*, written several decades after the Conquest, we encounter a portrait of a defensible settlement famed throughout Britain, and at peace with the world outside its walls.

There are few references to 'Anglo-Saxon England' or 'the Anglo-Saxons' in these pages outside of direct quotations or the titles of works, aside from those places where the term is explicitly the subject of discussion. Though I have often used 'Anglo-Saxon' as a term of convenience in earlier works, in many contexts it suggests degrees of

homogeneity that are unhelpful. In the interests of allowing for regional variation, the transmission and development of ideas over generations, and the coexistence of conflicting ideas, I have chosen instead to use temporal and geographical terms of convenience to frame the argument. Thus, for the reasons discussed below, I use the archaeological shorthand of ‘early-’, ‘mid-’, and ‘late-Saxon’ to describe periods of time, but refer to the ‘early Middle Ages’ or the ‘early medieval’ period rather than the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ age.<sup>3</sup> The idea of an ‘Anglo-Saxon England’ would not have been familiar to many until it was promoted as part of the political ambitions of late-Saxon Wessex. Thus, when referring to the territories occupied largely by Old English-speaking peoples that are often described as the ‘Anglo-Saxon kingdoms’, I will write about ‘early medieval England’, at least partially as a recognition of the changes that these polities and landscapes underwent throughout the course of the period.<sup>4</sup>

## Texts

Arguments can be made for reading almost anything as a text: iconography, stamps on cremation urns, and cloisonné are all deliberate systems of encoding meaning. So too are inscriptions in landscapes, such as field systems, the layout of planned and unplanned settlements, or cemeteries. One could make a case that the selective breeding of livestock, cereal crops, or fruit trees is part of this, and that the way in which all of these things change and define human interactions with other objects and networks of meaning can be read ‘textually.’<sup>5</sup> The use of ‘text’ here is more limited and traditional, not because I think it is not valuable to treat any of the categories above ‘textually’, but because my focus is the relationship between the written word and the material record.<sup>6</sup> ‘Text’, here, is a term of convenience referring to words written down, and may encompass a range of different kinds of documentary evidence, including charters, chronicles, law codes, histories, religious writings, and works of literature.<sup>7</sup> Every medievalist knows that the generic boundaries of these various forms of textual evidence are somewhat arbitrary and permeable. It is also the case that in different contexts all of these different kinds of writing might be

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3 On the difficulties of this terminology, see Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, p. 34.

4 I use ‘England’ as a geographical term of convenience to refer to the area peopled by various groups (including Britons, Danes, and others) that roughly corresponded with the area that by the eleventh century extended across ‘the bulk of what is now England’, and was by that time dominated politically by the royal house of Wessex; see Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century*, p. 5.

5 On these possibilities, see essays in Shryock and Smail, eds, *Deep History*. More recently, the study of epigenetics has shown how traumatic events may modify the epigenome in such a way as to ‘write’ (my quotes) human experience into the genetic inheritance of subsequent generations. For an accessible introduction see Moore, *The Developing Genome*.

6 This is not to devalue the materiality of manuscripts, as discussed by essays in Wilcox, ed., *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound*; and Wilcox, ‘The Sensory Cost of Remediation’.

7 OED *n.* sense 1.a.

considered 'religious' works in some sense, if only because of the frequency with which their authors appealed to divine authority. Equally, all might (if purely through their alliterative properties, to include charters) be thought of as possessing literary qualities, whether self-consciously or otherwise.

One of the significant challenges faced by early medievalists, perhaps to an even greater extent than scholars of the later Middle Ages, is that of working with texts so overtly connected with social and cultural elites. This is a double-edged sword. Texts produced by networks of power and privilege can reveal a great deal about how religious and secular elites conceptualized and transmitted ideas about places and settlements. They can, for example, reveal the manner in which they were thought of as sites of important symbolic significance, resonating with the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, or how they reflected the nature of cosmic order. Or they might tell us about how they featured in networks of gift-giving and political power, maintaining and maintained by social and cultural orthodoxies. By the same token, they are less likely than the archaeological record to say much about the everyday experience of people who less often left a mark on the historical record — people of lower status like the poet Cædmon, whose ordinariness (in the eyes of Bede) was part of what made his literary career so extraordinary. The voices of most people who lived and died in the early Middle Ages appear infrequently, and then often in ways which draw attention to the discomforts of subsistence living, rather than concerns more supposedly elevated.

On a daily basis there was more interaction between these social strata than is seen in texts, and poets like the author of *The Battle of Maldon*, to take one example, were clearly invested in the dialogues that took place across these social boundaries. Thus the men who pledge their allegiance to Byrhtnoth after his death are from a variety of backgrounds, a point made through the series of speeches given towards the end of the poem. This alone speaks volumes about contemporary desires for perceived social cohesion from *ceorl* to *cyning*. This book focuses principally on the vernacular tradition in the interests of reflecting the ways in which places (inhabited, uninhabited, or fortified) are represented in works that would have been accessible to all speakers of Old English who may have heard them read aloud, rather than those who could read and write Old English, or understand, read, or write in Latin. In doing so it aims to engage with the broad spectrum of audiences that these works may have reached, directly or indirectly. As we can infer from episodes such as Bede's story of Cædmon, or Alcuin's complaints about Ingeld, this poetry was not just for kings and ealdormen, but also reached the ears of ecclesiastical communities and those who worked on the land. This is not to claim that all levels of society were necessarily familiar with all kinds of literature to an equal extent, but rather that ideas about power, authority, and the roles of settlements and strongholds within these works were controlled and maintained by the same forces that promoted the orthodoxies concerning lordship, land, and duty that are visible in *Maldon*, whether or not they were formally and consciously articulated in the same way. Part of the case put forward is that many of the ideas about settlements and strongholds found in early medieval English writings belong to the same set of ideas about relationships between people and things that are well known from other aspects of material and

textual culture.<sup>8</sup> The message of these texts was, in ideological terms, fundamentally integrative, expressing the horror of exclusion and the necessity of belonging.

Insular Latin texts are considered primarily to illuminate the discussion of vernacular texts. Though Latin works were not circulated as widely, as their use was naturally limited to those who understood the language, they are found throughout these pages where they have direct relevance to texts in the vernacular. In Chapter 2, which focuses in part on Gildas and Bede, I discuss these authors and their histories in order to demonstrate the emergence of an historical tradition that was responsible, in part, for responses to the post-Roman landscape found in vernacular texts. Gildas and Bede set the stage here; the vernacular tradition responded to the narrative they manufactured. Bede's *Historia* is also important in Chapter 3, which discusses the relationship between the Latin narrative framing *Cædmon's Hymn* and the Old English text(s) glossing the Latin version of the *Hymn* in manuscripts. Here, I focus on the relationship between the cosmological (and cosmogonic) structuring of the *Hymn* and other vernacular texts, and how Bede represents the ordering of secular and ecclesiastical society and settlements. This is also reflected in works that preceded the writing of the *Historia* (such as *De Tabernaculo*), but most prominently in *De Templo*, which describes the construction of the universal Church from building materials that are directly compared with humans, and sheds significant light on the *Historia* when the two are read in parallel. In subsequent chapters I suggest that *De Templo* may have been an important influence on later texts, albeit through a general understanding of its content rather than direct knowledge of Bede's Latin.

This is especially the case in Chapter 4, part of which addresses ideas about settlements, strongholds, and society in those works that were for a long time claimed as part of an 'Alfredian' canon, though I will discuss them here in more neutral terms as the products of an Alfredian cultural milieu. The focus of this chapter is less obviously on the relationship between the Old English *Pastoral Care*, *Consolation*, *Soliloquies*, and the Latin texts they translate or adapt, and more on the prefaces and alterations to these works made by vernacular authors. Here I also include reference to Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, primarily to discuss what it reveals about contemporary responses to the coercive programmes of Alfredian Wessex. Towards the end of the penultimate chapter, I draw parallels between the work of Orderic Vitalis and the author of *Durham* to show some of the ways in which late Old English poetry was changing to reflect Anglo-Norman ideas about settlements and landscapes. These parameters broadly define the limits of this study, which is not intended as a comprehensive assessment of all possible evidence for settlements and strongholds in the textual tradition, but rather as a starting point for future discussion. There is plenty of scope for further investigation that will doubtless prove profitable, including further study of the Anglo-Latin works that were accessible to more limited audiences, and more extensive consideration of other prose works including homilies and saints' lives. Equally, though perhaps more problematically, riddling texts such as those of the Exeter Book have a great deal of potential as sources for the discussion of place and home.

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8 On approaches to this topic from various perspectives see essays in Lees and Overing, eds, *A Place to Believe In*.

The dating of Old English poetry is problematic at best, and whilst scholars mostly agree that the four major poetic codices were created in the second half of the tenth century or the early eleventh, little consensus is found beyond this. What I have attempted to demonstrate, in my use of Old English poetry, is that some ideas had their origins in experiences of the landscape that were already old when they found their way into some of the few works of poetry that have survived. In many cases they were older still when these poems found their way into manuscripts, but no less important to their compilers as a consequence of their antiquity. This is certainly the case in Chapter 2, where I discuss the well-known representation of Roman ruins, and also the sort of works whose use of the *locus amoenus* tradition may have something to tell us about perceptions of the rural settlements largely absent from literature. In Chapter 3 I discuss *Cædmon's Hymn* in the broader contexts of the poetic corpus to reflect on what it reveals about the ordering of the cosmos. This argument is presented both in the contexts of Bede's *Historia* and his other exegetical works, but also with reference to *Beowulf*. Whether or not there will ever be any agreement on the dating of *Beowulf* is not of paramount importance here. What the poem reflects, whether one is an early or late dater, is the concept of the hall as a centrepiece of settlement ideology, which has ties with the same cosmic imagery found in *Cædmon's Hymn*. On these grounds there is no great difficulty in discussing its relevance to both mid- and late-Saxon contexts.

Aside from the late Old English *Durham* (commonly dated to the early twelfth century) there are two works whose relevance to historical events in the late ninth and tenth centuries is conjectured in this study: *Andreas* and *Judith*. In Chapter 4 I argue that *Andreas* may be best understood within the contexts of Alfredian military, intellectual, and social reforms, building on my earlier work on this topic, and on the linguistic, historical, palaeographical, and archaeological evidence discussed in my edition of the poem with Richard North.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in Chapter 5, I build on the arguments of Mark Griffith, who tentatively dated *Judith* to the ninth or tenth centuries, and the cadre of scholars who have also argued that the ideological ambitions of this work should be understood in relation to viking hostilities.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not the reader accepts these proposed contexts for *Andreas* and *Judith*, their presentation of towns and strongholds is likely to have been significant at the time they were preserved in manuscripts, whether or not they were written with the aim of representing contemporary urban environments. With this in mind, making no specific claims about the dating of *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Daniel*, in Chapter 5 I discuss representations of cities in these works with a view to understanding what they tell us about late-Saxon conceptions of the relationship between urban places and power.

If one of the principal aims of this book is to encourage dialogue between those who study written texts and those who study material culture, another must be to encourage those who primarily study literary texts towards greater reflection on the material conditions of life in the early Middle Ages. Treating works of Old English

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<sup>9</sup> *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley.

<sup>10</sup> *Judith*, ed. by Griffith.

literature as though they were produced in a void, without much consideration of how the landscape changed or remained the same over the course of seven centuries, is a common failing in literary scholarship. It is important to recognise that as the intellectual landscape of England changed over time, so too did the places in which its literature was created and appreciated. This, as these pages will argue, was nothing if not a complex and multidirectional process of exchange, recycling, renewal, and innovation, in which ideas about settlements and strongholds could prove just as powerful and enduring as their physical forms.

## Materials

Karl Popper wrote that ‘we are not students of some subject matter but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline.’<sup>11</sup> John Hines, similarly, has discussed the ‘close and deep affinity between material artefacts and literature as products of human cultural activity’, writing that both fundamentally involve ‘the same exercises of interpretation, analysis and evaluation.’<sup>12</sup> Following Hines’ lead, my aim is not to exclude specialist knowledge in any field by putting forward ‘extreme claims that long-held and reasonably based understandings are seriously deficient’, but to show how the processes involved in studying the material and textual culture surrounding settlements and their development may profit from more open dialogue.<sup>13</sup> This will naturally, to some, seem more or less experimental and exploratory in certain areas, whilst in other areas the approach will seem far more familiar and traditional.<sup>14</sup>

The approach I have adopted is chronological, not because we are able to date much of the period’s literature with any great certainty, but because we *can* attempt this with greater confidence when it comes to discussing other forms of documentary evidence (e.g. chronicles) and material evidence (e.g. typologies, carbon dating, and so on). I have adopted archaeological conventions to refer to temporal divisions within the period 400–1100 because they are already familiar to those who work with material culture, but also because they will provide a chronological backbone to support literary scholars and others less inclined to focus on historical and material contexts. These are the periods 400–650 (early Saxon), 650–850 (mid Saxon), and 850–1066 (late Saxon), though my discussion towards the end of the book strays beyond the Conquest. This is absolutely not to suggest that the texts discussed in relation to these periods were necessarily written ‘in’ them, as I will demonstrate. There are also natural limits to the kinds of settlements, strongholds, and landscapes

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11 Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 88.

12 Hines, *Voices in the Past*, p. 26.

13 Hines, *Voices in the Past*, p. 36.

14 This is a development of approaches in my earlier work on settlements, landscapes, and expressions of belief. Examples include Bintley, ‘Demythologising Urban Landscapes’; Bintley and Shapland, eds, *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*; Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*; Bintley, ‘Towns in Transition’.



that can be profitably discussed in an interdisciplinary study of this kind, especially if the textual record is thin, and reveals little about how people conceptualized these places. Because of the contexts in which texts were written, and literature was produced, the majority of what I have to say focuses on the importance of elite sites and settlements, and the way in which their significance was managed and modified.

'Landscape' is no less difficult a term than 'text', not least because it would have been unknown to medieval people, having entered the English language in the early modern era. When the term 'landscape' is used here, it is almost always in relation to settlements or the absence of settlements. For the purposes of this study, therefore, settlement landscapes are areas of land in which are found human-made structures (and other features) created for the purposes of human habitation, or — in the case of strongholds — for the purposes of temporary or permanent defence. As I will go on to discuss, a settlement may be a stronghold, and a stronghold may be a place of settlement, but one does not necessarily imply the other. It would be difficult to claim an unenclosed village as a stronghold, or a fort as a settlement if it was occupied only in times of need. These loose definitions of settlement and stronghold landscapes should be thought of as applicable both to physical landscapes and to conceptual landscapes such as those found in idealized or fictionalized contexts.

My approach to the material evidence is as follows. In Chapter 2 I discuss stone-built settlements (forts and towns) in the post-Roman landscape. Although these kinds of places show greater uniformity across Europe (and further afield) than anything from the medieval period, they were not all the same, they were not all built in the same sorts of places, they had different relationships with the surrounding landscape to one another, and some were occupied for far longer than others. Likewise, rural settlements of the early-Saxon period were not identical; there are type sites discussed in these chapters, like West Stow, but this does not presume anything like absolute cultural uniformity amongst diverse peoples with potentially varied ideas about the places they inhabited.

Chapter 3 begins by considering the reuse of Roman sites as places for early Christian churches, for which there is good evidence, and goes on to consider both high-status and ecclesiastical settlements, categories that overlapped significantly. Particular attention is paid to the minster sites that have been a focus of John Blair's research, and which are especially relevant to my discussion of Cædmon and his *Hymn*. These may, at least to modern eyes, have been the closest thing to built-up settlements in an essentially non-urban landscape. They were also contemporary, however, with the major *emporia* or *wīc* sites at London, York, Southampton, and Ipswich, which emerged in the seventh century (if not before), and seem to have reached their peak in the eighth. What is curious about these places is that, although they were large, densely occupied, and generated significant amounts of wealth, they are largely absent from the textual record, and almost entirely absent from vernacular literature, if they can be found there at all.

The end of Chapter 3 also discusses the potential role of *burh* sites in Mercia before the implementation and development of the burghal system in the late ninth and tenth centuries under Alfred and his offspring. The burghal system requires that this study consider 'strongholds' as well as 'settlements'; the former were places

that could have been defended, but were not necessarily constructed with these ends in mind. Not all of the burhs became settlements, though many did, and some were better suited to this purpose than others. The discussion towards the end of this study focuses primarily upon proto-urban and fortified settlements, which are especially prominent in the textual record, though the landscape of the Domesday Book could hardly be called 'urbanised', and the majority of the population did not live in urban places. We should be cautious, as modern observers, not to impose our understanding of urban environments onto the early medieval past. Cities were not then, as is often assumed now (and often by those who live in cities), the yardstick of human achievement.

Much of what I claim about approaches to Roman ruins in Chapter 2 is likely to have been as relevant to those living in the fifth century as it was to those living in the eleventh. The same is equally true of the more rural settlements discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, which focus on the early- and middle-Saxon periods, though this does not mean that what I have written here is not relevant to our understanding of late-Saxon rural settlements. This is also the case when it comes to discussing places whose ideological importance is well represented, but which do not appear prominently in texts. There are also several places where the kinds of settlements and strongholds considered may have varied significantly in form and function over time. In Chapter 3, for example, neither the minster nor *wīc* sites that are the focus of my discussion might have appeared the same (or in many cases have been visible at all) to those living only a few generations later. Nor did attempts to stimulate urban life in many tenth-century burhs (Chapters 4 and 5) achieve any immediate success. Striking a balance between the general and the specific is not a straightforward matter, especially when texts are even more elusive than the story in the soil. Sites like late-Saxon manorial settlements and other later rural settlements do not make much of an appearance for this reason, an issue which is discussed in greater detail at the beginning of Chapter 5. Here, I suggest that this apparent omission from the written record may, to some degree, be a consequence of symbolism shared across various kinds of high-status sites in towns and the countryside. This raises important questions about the difference between early medieval and modern approaches to categorizing 'urban' and 'rural' settlements.

One final point to be made concerning the limits of this study is that it does not endeavour to cover the visual arts of early medieval England. There is valuable evidence to be considered from various sources, including stone sculpture, ivories, manuscript illustrations, and other objects such as the Bayeux Tapestry. Many of these have already been mined for information about early medieval architecture and may have much more to offer the subject of this investigation, as studies like John Blair's *Building Anglo-Saxon England* have shown. Given the length of the period and the range of evidence already under investigation, this study can only hope to cover so much, and the omission of this material from the discussion is in no way intended to disregard its importance, but rather to encourage discussion of the representation of settlements and strongholds in the art-historical record by others. In the case of manuscript illustrations, where the majority of these representations are found, it is also worth considering their accessibility to wider audiences, as in the case of Latin



texts. In some cases literary works were preserved alongside images with which they enjoyed complex and nuanced interplay; MS Junius 11, home to *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*, offers a case in point. These images travelled with these poems and were, it almost goes without saying, intended by the compiler(s) to be read in tandem. However, the circulation of the images in this manuscript would naturally have been more limited, and lacking in the general availability afforded by the written and spoken word to be recalled, recited, and circulated in various forms across societal strata in the same fashion. This is not to say that visual arts did not have a part to play in this circular and ongoing dialogue, but rather that they lie beyond the scope of the present study.

## Contexts

The problem at hand — what the relationship between material culture and written texts can tell us about the early English settlement landscape — has not been the subject of significant study to date. There are some exceptions. Lori Ann Garner's *Structuring Spaces*, two thirds of which focus on the early Middle Ages, offers some discussion of the material contexts of buildings in relation to their representation in Old English literature.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Mark Atherton has briefly discussed the representation of 'urban' sites in late-Saxon literature, with some reference to 'the world outside the text'.<sup>16</sup> The most recent intervention into this area of early medieval studies came as this project was reaching completion, in the form of Nicole Guenther Discenza's *Inhabited Spaces: Anglo-Saxon Constructions of Place*, in which two chapters focus on the representation of settlements in early English texts.<sup>17</sup> This work has made a valuable contribution to the literature in its investigation of early English concepts of space and habitation, considering this topic in terms both cosmic and terrestrial. However, Discenza's arguments are not focused on comparing the inhabited spaces found in texts (primarily Old English poetry) with the material record.

There is thus no one scholarly tradition from which this book proceeds, but rather the work of various scholars in various fields. First, and most numerous, are the archaeologists whose labours from the second half of the twentieth century onwards have made it now possible to write about places like burhs and *wīc* sites with some confidence. Much of this material has been synthesized and discussed in John Blair's *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, also published while the present work was nearing completion, and which it complements in various ways.<sup>18</sup> Given the interest of this book in the relationship between people and things, it will be no surprise that it draws on the ideas of a number of writers and theorists whose work is similarly concerned with investigating and unravelling connections between humans and the

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15 Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 32–51. Garner's observations are noted throughout.

16 Atherton, "Sudden Wonder", p. 74.

17 Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*.

18 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*.

non-human. Though I adopt no single approach wholesale, avoiding the use of a toolkit, my research builds on approaches to networks of people and things advanced by Bruno Latour in his Actor-Network Theory and integrated into Ian Hodder's theory of entanglement.<sup>19</sup> These ideas have been further developed in the work of Lambros Malafouris, who identifies an 'extended mind' outside the human body that includes artefacts and other cultural productions; this is an approach that complements the arguments of this book in its aims to locate settlements and strongholds in physical and conceptual landscapes.<sup>20</sup> These ideas also resonate with concepts from speculative realism, vibrant materialism, and object-oriented ontology that have been advanced by Graham Harman, Jane Bennett, and Timothy Morton, and which others such as Jeffrey Cohen have employed effectively in the analysis of medieval texts.<sup>21</sup>

The contributions of scholars working in early medieval studies are best identified on a chapter-by-chapter basis, with some exceptions. Hugh Magennis' approach to understanding early medieval society through its poetry in *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* served as a model for my readings of the relationship between these people and their buildings and settlements.<sup>22</sup> In Chapters 2 and 3 my discussion builds on Nicholas Howe's important work on the relationship between Old English literature and the idea of Rome, and his seminal discussion of early English origin stories in *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*.<sup>23</sup> This complements my use of Tyler Bell's study of the way that Roman ruins were apparently reused for religious purposes both before and after the conversion era, albeit ostensibly to serve very different purposes.<sup>24</sup> Bell is not the only commentator to have worked on the early medieval reception of the prehistoric and Roman past, however, and my discussion of this topic has also been informed by the substantial body of work produced by Sarah Semple and Howard Williams, amongst others.<sup>25</sup> Equally, Helena Hamerow's study of rural settlements has provided archaeological contexts for my discussion of idealized rural places in Chapter 2, and in my discussion of the elegies in Chapter 3.<sup>26</sup> In contextualising my discussion of Cædmon, and Bede's conception of the Temple, I have relied on the models presented by John Blair in his landmark study of the role of minsters in the religious and political landscape.<sup>27</sup> I have also relied on the labours of those who have translated and offered commentary on Bede's exegetical works, especially in the case of *De Templo*, where I have built on the foundational work of the late Jennifer O'Reilly, and Conor O'Brien's recent

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19 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Hodder, *Entangled*.

20 Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*.

21 Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism*; Harman, *The Quadruple Object*; Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*; Morton, *The Ecological Thought*; Morton, *Hyperobjects*; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Cohen, *Stone*.

22 Magennis, *Images of Community*.

23 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*; Howe, 'The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England'; Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England'; Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void'.

24 Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings'; Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*.

25 e.g. Semple, 'A Fear of the Past'; Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*; Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead'.

26 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*.

27 The most comprehensive study being Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*.

monograph.<sup>28</sup> Although Cædmon and his *Hymn* have amassed a considerable number of camp followers, Daniel O'Donnell's multimedia study acts as the basis for my discussion of the poem as representing long-established traditions in Old English literature.<sup>29</sup> However, the work which has made the most obvious contribution to this chapter's discussion of the relationship between the material world of Bede and Cædmon, and its relationship with the texts, is Allen Frantzen and John Hines' edited volume dedicated to this topic.<sup>30</sup> I build on this work by making a case for the unity of the *Hymn* with the wider contexts of the *Historia*, and the relationship between these texts, Bede's exegesis, and the organization of minster settlements. In Chapter 4, which focuses on the late-Saxon period (roughly defined), my discussion begins with a case study of *Andreas*, in which I have benefitted greatly from working on the poem with Richard North, but also on the efforts of those who edited and translated the poem before us, including Robert Boenig, Kenneth Brooks, and George Krapp.<sup>31</sup>

Chapters 4 and 5 focus primarily on the impacts of viking raiding and settlement, and how these changes came to redefine ideas about settlements and strongholds in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Scholarship concerning urban archaeology of the kind that was carried out by David Hill, for example, is once again too vast to be represented adequately in this introduction.<sup>32</sup> This said, perhaps the most significant interdisciplinary study of the Burghal Hidage to have emerged in recent years (both in terms of original research and synthesis) is the book-length treatment by John Baker and Stuart Brookes of its workings in the landscape, which together with Ryan Lavelle's comprehensive survey of military organization at the time of Alfred has proved invaluable to my arguments.<sup>33</sup> The body of work on Alfred the Great and the 'Alfredian' texts and translations (a group of works whose supposed unity has been the subject of some scrutiny in recent years) is similarly extensive. The most significant advance in the contexts of this study has been Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine's edition of the Old English *Consolation of Philosophy*, as well as Nicole Discenza's work on the extended 'Alfredian' canon as a whole.<sup>34</sup> The final chapter draws upon no single established discourse in literary-historical criticism, given that its focus is upon the representation of urban places in works written and/or codified at the turn of the millennium, and as such what I have to say here does not build directly on any single body of scholarship; the literature is given due consideration in the course of the discussion.

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28 Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, introduction by O'Reilly; O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*.

29 Cædmon's *Hymn*, ed. by O'Donnell.

30 Frantzen, 'All Created Things'.

31 *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley; *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*, trans. by Boenig; *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by Brooks; *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by Krapp.

32 For a full account of David Hill's works, see Worthington Hill, 'Published Works by David H. Hill'.

33 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*; Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*.

34 *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine; Discenza, *The King's English*.



## Ruin Mythologies

When the British monk Gildas wrote his *De Excidio Britanniae* he presented a lurid version of events in which, following the withdrawal of Roman military support, the towns of Britain fell victim to fire and the sword at the hands of various groups of mercenaries and settlers, amongst whom he included the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Bede and other authors made use of this narrative in such a way that it became an integral part of mythologies of migration and settlement in early English Latin and vernacular texts. Despite its obvious inventions, this narrative continues to affect scholarly and popular understanding of the period c. 400–600 to the present day. Although the sources of this story are familiar to all students of the period, their reassessment and reappraisal remains an important focus of research and ongoing discussion. The beginning of this chapter discusses the extent to which Bede absorbed Gildas' narrative of urban destruction in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Thus validated, the same account was repeated in the Old English translation of the *Historia* in the late ninth century, and subsequently reaffirmed by Wulfstan of York in his early eleventh-century *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.

What this chapter shows is that the imagined role of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the destruction of Britain's towns, together with slaughter of their inhabitants, became an integral part of Bedan mythologies of origins, and as familiar as the story that the ancestors of Bede's Angles, Saxons, and Jutes had first arrived in three ships at the behest of Vortigern. I suggest that Old English poetry reflects the same mythologies of urban ruin as a consequence of this, focusing on the well-known representation of abandoned Roman buildings in the Exeter Book 'elegies' *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*. Although these works are not thought to have been composed during the early-Saxon period, but rather closer to the late tenth- or early eleventh-century contexts of the manuscript, they may still represent the experience of those who inherited this landscape in the fifth and sixth centuries, encountering the material past of Roman Britain on a daily basis.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the chapter, the focus shifts to the kind of settlements that were established in southern and eastern England during the early-Saxon period, often in rural environments, though also in proximity to Roman ruins. The loose and often apparently nebulous form of these 'villages', which are comparable in some respects with their continental predecessors and counterparts, are then considered in the context of idealized rural *loci amoeni* in Old English poetry. The depiction of paradisiacal places in works like *The Phoenix* and *Beowulf*, amongst others, is

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1 See discussion of dating in Chapter 1, pp. 21–22.

characteristic of an enthusiasm for idealized rural landscapes that may also have had its roots earlier in the period, when the boundaries between settlements and the surrounding environment were less clearly delineated, and the forms of rural settlements less clearly defined.

## The Desolation of Britain

### *Gildas, De Excidio Britanniae*

Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae* is the only commentary by a near contemporary to describe the fate of the towns following the end of a formal Roman presence in Britain. Though it was probably written in the early to mid-sixth century, an exact dating is less of a concern here than the manner in which it was used by Bede, and received by his readers.<sup>2</sup> According to Gildas, the towns of Britain faced destruction by fire and the sword following the withdrawal of Roman military power, a sequence of events no longer thought to be accurate, even if it may preserve some elements of truth.<sup>3</sup> The still-emerging picture of what happened to urban settlements during this period is not one of wholesale slaughter and forced evacuation, as Gildas would have us believe, but rather of decline in the decades preceding the so-called *adventus Saxonum*.<sup>4</sup>

A popular view is that the life of Roman towns was largely dependent on the tax system, and once this had collapsed, with their prior function as centres of trade and residence having been removed, the decline of their urban character followed as a natural consequence, perhaps expedited by epidemic disease.<sup>5</sup> Whilst some have argued that the archaeology of towns in this period suggests they were

2 Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 44–46; Yorke, 'The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms', p. 26. The later *Historia Brittonum*, formerly attributed to Nennius, by contrast, reveals little.

3 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 51.

4 This is clearly the source of what Ken Dark refers to as the 'conventional picture' of Roman Britain's end, and the one that governs the view of 'many professional archaeologists and historians' of 'Post-Roman cataclysm'. Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, p. 12. See also commentary in Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, pp. 99, 122; Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 48; Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', p. 220; Faulkner, 'Change and Decline in Late Romano-British Towns', pp. 25–26. The seminal work on the complexity of the fifth-century movement of peoples, their ethnic identities, and the 'end' of the Roman Empire is Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*.

5 Gelling, *The West Midlands*, p. 21; see also discussion in White, 'Wroxeter and the Transformation of Late-Roman Urbanism', pp. 112–13; Haslam, 'The Towns of Wiltshire', pp. 138–40; Hinton, 'The Towns of Hampshire', pp. 162–63; Esmonde-Cleary, 'The Ending(s) of Roman Britain', pp. 20–22; Henig, 'The Fate of Late Roman Towns', p. 525; Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, pp. 48–49. This process took place in contrast with comparable 'successor states' in mainland Europe, as noted in Christie, 'Construction and Deconstruction'.

abandoned,<sup>6</sup> Martin Henig notes that others (including himself) have maintained ‘more or less total continuity of settlement, even though this was accompanied by very considerable changes in material and cultural life.’<sup>7</sup> Henig views the former towns as having ‘retained a real presence and vitality in the landscape until the seventh century at least’, and has considered a range of material evidence including objects, burials, and buildings which indicates continued occupation in places such as *Verulamium* (St Albans), Silchester, Carlisle, Dorchester, and Wroxeter, in addition to enduring British ‘centres of power’ at Bath, Gloucester, and Cirencester.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Gavin Speed has argued that ‘in numerous towns life persisted, albeit with their character and form transformed’, enduring in three forms: as sub-Roman urban places, as rural settlements with ‘an “Anglo-Saxon character”’, or as rural shifted settlements (to paraphrase), though this was not the case in all places, and in some there are clear indications of ‘settlement failure’.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not occupation was maintained in former Roman towns or forts, it was on a greatly reduced scale. Those living within or near to these places did not repair or maintain stone buildings in the manner of their former occupants, nor did they build in stone themselves. This urban decay offered a fitting backdrop to the story told by Gildas, and must, to his contemporaries, have seemed a plausible consequence of the violence he describes.

The *De Excidio Britanniae* was written in the tradition of Jeremiah and other Old Testament prophets recalling the violent destruction of kingdoms and empires, whose aim was to admonish their contemporaries for their sins, and to provide a warning for those left behind to reflect on their ruin.<sup>10</sup> For Bede and other contemporary readers, one especially important aspect of Gildas’ account is his claim that those who had taken the lands of the British had done so through God’s will, as a punishment for the island-dwellers’ sins. Whether or not Gildas’ version of events is, as some have thought, ‘substantially true’, he writes with a conviction that leaves us in little doubt about the sort of truth he was attempting to convey, and which he must have believed on at least some level.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, whilst the archaeological record has not produced an abundance of mass graves suggesting that the towns of sub-Roman Britain were destroyed and their inhabitants massacred, this is the narrative that Gildas was keen to pass on.

6 Henig, ‘The Fate of Late Roman Towns’, p. 51. In this group Henig includes Brooks, ‘A Review of the Evidence for Continuity’; Esmonde-Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain*; and Wachter, *The Towns of Roman Britain*, pp. 408–21. See also Esmonde-Cleary, ‘The Ending(s) of Roman Britain’, pp. 13–29.

7 Henig, ‘The Fate of Late Roman Towns’, p. 515. Henig cites Thacker and Sharpe, eds, *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*; Henig, *The Heirs of King Verica*, pp. 125–44; Henig, ‘Remaining Roman in Britain AD 300–700’; and Fulford, Clarke, and Eckardt, *Life and Labour in Late Roman Silchester*, esp. pp. 278–80.

8 Henig, ‘The Fate of Late Roman Towns’, p. 516.

9 Speed, *Towns in the Dark?*, p. 136.

10 Hills, *Origins of the English*, p. 25; Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, p. 43; Higham, ‘Historical Narrative as Cultural Politics’, p. 75.

11 Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain*, p. 106.



He writes that under continued military pressure from barbarians on all sides (albeit in the following quotation those specifically north of Hadrian's Wall), 'relictis civitatibus muroque celso iterum civibus fugae' (our citizens fled the towns and the high wall).<sup>12</sup> Later, following the arrival of Vortigern's mercenaries, he describes the violent end of Britain's towns in vivid detail, presenting the reader with scenes of total destruction:

Ita ut cunctae coloniae crebris arietibus omnesque coloni cum praepositis ecclesiae, cum sacerdotibus ac populo, mucronibus undique micantibus ac flammis crepitatibus, simul solo sternerentur, et miserabili visu in medio platearum ima turrium edito cardine evulsarum murorumque celsorum saxa, sacra altaria, cadaverum frusta, crustis ac si gelantibus purpurei cruoris tecta, velut in quodam horrendo torculari mixta viderentur.<sup>13</sup>

[So it was that all of the Roman towns were destroyed by the repeated battering of rams, all of the citizens together with the leaders of the Church, with the priests, and the populace, as the blades of swords glittered everywhere, and flames crackled; it was a wretched sight. In the middle of the squares the foundations of lofty walls and towers had been torn out from their elevated base, and with sacred altars, and bits of corpses, were crusted over as if with a purple coating of congealed blood, looking just as though they had been churned up in some horrific wine-press.]

In his discussion of these lines Nicholas Howe pointed out that settlers arriving in Britain were experiencing a postcolonial landscape 'in the most literal sense of the term', and emphasized the extent to which they presented contemporary British readers with 'a world-turned upside down'.<sup>14</sup> The destruction described here focuses on those elements which, for Gildas, were essential to the established order of urban life; altars are broken, stone structures have been torn down, and bloodstained bodies lie unburied. It is also worth noting Howe's suggestion that the evocation of wine in these lines may also be intended as a conscious reference to Roman culture, given that wine retained these associations with Rome in early medieval Britain, not least through the Church.<sup>15</sup> This wine might also, and perhaps more obviously, be thought of as the blood of sacrificial victims upon profaned altars. This possibility invites further investigation. Gildas precedes this description with a quotation from Psalm 79, which explicitly aligns urban places with the Temple of God. It reads "'Deus, venerunt gentes in hereditam tuam; coinquinarunt templum sanctum tuum", et cetera' ('God, the heathens have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple'; and so on).<sup>16</sup>

12 *De Excidio* chap. 19 (p. 95). All references to Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, ed. and trans. by Winterbottom.

13 *De Excidio* chap. 24 (p. 98).

14 Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', pp. 25, 28.

15 Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', pp. 27–28.

16 *De Excidio* chap. 24 (pp. 97–98). The Vulgate reads: 'Deus venerunt gentes in hereditatem tuam polluerunt templum sanctum tuum'. Gildas' use of *coinquinarunt* rather than *polluerunt* is likely due to his use of a Psalter older than Jerome's translation. See *De Excidio* (p. 12).



If Gildas took these major towns to be representatives of the Temple, then the desecration of these altars, scattered amongst bloodstained bodies and fragments of buildings, can be seen as an incomplete celebration of the sacrament, halted by invaders whose assaults serve as divine punishment for the sins of the British. This leaves us with the sense of a mass interrupted, and a covenant incomplete, as though the redemptive celebration of the Eucharist has failed to take place; the flesh and blood of the Britons serves only as a grim reminder of the words spoken during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Here the rite is incomplete, the congregation have failed in their religious obligations, and the bodily ‘temples’ of the unrepentant British — as far as Gildas is concerned — have suffered the consequences.

This chapter of the *De Excidio* concludes with reference to the vision of Obadiah, who cautioned the Edomites against pride, with Gildas comparing the ruined towns of the Britons and the fallen temples of God with pillaged fields and vineyards.<sup>17</sup> This draws attention not only to the destruction of the urban foundations of Roman Britain and their citizens, but also to the economic life of the surrounding hinterlands that were essential, in turn, to the life of towns:

Ita enim degeneraverat tunc vinea illa olim bona in amaritudinem uti raro, secundum prophetam, videretur quasi post tergum vindemiatorum aut messorum racemus vel spica.<sup>18</sup>

[For by then the vineyard that was once good had degenerated into bitterness, so that in accordance with the prophet, there was seldom a bunch of grapes or an ear of corn to be seen in the wake of the vintners and reapers.]

Although Gildas does not offer many useful ‘spatial indicators’ to help modern readers understand the nature of Britain’s towns (or their infrastructure), given the emphasis upon agrarian as well as urban imagery in this passage, it seems clear that he was well aware of the relationship between urban centres and the agricultural lands that supported them.<sup>19</sup>

In this way Gildas presents his readers with a tableau of the towns, God-sustained and God-glorifying, whose centre-pieces are the sacred altars positioned ‘in medio platearum’ (in the middle of the squares), and desecrated as a consequence of the moral failings of the British. This has led not only to the loss of these sanctuaries, and the lives of those who once kept them holy, but also to the desolation of the lands supporting and supported by the towns. In earlier work on this transitional period, Judith Turner indicated that the majority of pollen diagrams suggested ‘a regenerated forest’, as well as a ‘lower proportion of arable and pasture land’ in Britain at this time — features

17 ‘Si fures introissent ad te, si latrones per noctem, quomodo conticuisses nonne furati essent sufficientia sibi si vindemiatores introissent ad te numquid saltim racemos reliquissent tibi’ (If thieves entered into you, if robbers in the night — how then are you cut off — would they not take as much as they wished? If grape-pickers came into you, would they not leave some grapes?, Obadiah 5). Cf. also Isaiah 24. 13.

18 *De Excidio* chap. 24 (p. 98).

19 Higham, ‘Imperium in Early Britain’, p. 31.

that contrast starkly with the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, which had seen forest clearance on a previously unprecedented scale.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Oliver Rackham concluded that although early medieval populations would later be responsible for the creation and enlargement of clearings in many places, evidence elsewhere pointed towards continuity, 'reorganisation', and even 'retreat', with woodland encroaching rapidly in farmland previously given over to crops and cattle.<sup>21</sup>

Following the work of the *Fields of Britannia* project, Stephen Rippon, Chris Smart, and Ben Pears have concluded that the 'traditional view' of fifth-century Britain as a period of 'catastrophe and discontinuity' is a result of the focus on the 'political history, the market-based economy' and the prosperity of elites rather than 'the majority of the population who lived in the countryside'.<sup>22</sup> Whilst the end of Roman Britain would have been a 'painful experience' for those who depended on the market economy, for those involved in producing agricultural surplus 'life would have changed less'.<sup>23</sup> They argue that because 'the issue of ethnicity still dominates archaeological interpretations', this has led to the 'assumption of discontinuity because an apparent change in material culture is taken to represent a change in who was managing the landscape'.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, they conclude that the landscape of the post-Roman period 'appears not to have been abandoned in most areas', but instead saw continuation 'in some form of management, if only grazing by livestock with sufficient intensity to prevent the regeneration of woodland'.<sup>25</sup> This does not indicate wholesale abandonment of the agricultural system, therefore, but rather a varied picture across the fifth to seventh centuries in which there was 'some continuity and some discontinuity' following 'the continuation of a trend already identifiable in the late Roman landscape'.<sup>26</sup>

This nuanced reading of the palaeoenvironmental and archaeological evidence for human action in the wider post-Roman landscape presents several possible narratives for land use in this period. These are essentially at odds with what Gildas suggests: that when the towns were destroyed, their agricultural hinterlands suffered accordingly. Gildas does not reveal whether this damage was long-lasting, however, for reasons that are not hard to guess. He may simply have been ignorant of what had happened, making a reasonable assumption that violence towards towns is often accompanied by violence towards people and property in surrounding areas. Alternatively, he may have chosen to privilege urban destruction because towns, to his mind, characterised the presence of

20 Turner, 'The Vegetation', pp. 71–72.

21 Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape*; Rackham, 'Trees and Woodland in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 8. In a study of particular relevance, Petra-Day notes the results of a detailed study conducted at Sidlings Copse, North East of Oxford, where deforestation had occurred during the Roman period, yet where 'woodland regeneration' began during the early Middle Ages, 'as seen in the increase in pollen frequency of oak and hazel and decline of herbs'. Petra-Day concedes that this may have also been due to designation as royal forest, ensuring protection from grazing animals. See Petra-Day, 'Origins of Medieval Woodland', p. 21; also Bassett, 'How the West was Won', p. 110.

22 Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, pp. 1, 3.

23 Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, p. 113.

24 Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, p. 114.

25 Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, p. 335.

26 Rippon and others, *The Fields of Britannia*, p. 335; also Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 22–24.

Rome in Britain. It is more likely, however, that he focused on the destruction of towns because it would have little suited his purposes to pen religious polemic suggesting that the lot of agricultural workers had changed little (and perhaps improved) after the collapse of markets, systems of taxation, and the machinery of spiritual regulation.

### **Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica***

Bede drew directly upon the *De Excidio* in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (completed c. 731) when discussing the fate of Britain's towns after the end of Roman rule, and in doing so granted this tradition new authority for an eighth-century audience.<sup>27</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams has noted that it was unfortunate for Bede that the sole surviving Insular Latin source upon which he had been 'forced' to draw was one so limited in its attempt to provide an accurate geographical and chronological account, and focused almost entirely on the British, yet there are certain passages of Gildas' work that Bede evidently adopted with interest and enthusiasm.<sup>28</sup> Where Gildas had foregrounded the importance of the defences and fortifications of Britain, Bede focuses on representing the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Picts as a sword in the hand of a vengeful God.<sup>29</sup> His description of what happened on the northern frontier follows the *De Excidio* closely. Concerning the fate of the British in the north, Gildas had written that:

Interea non cessant uncinata nudorum tela, quibus miserrimi cives de muris tracti solo allidebantur... Quid plura? relictis civitatibus muroque celso iterum civibus fugae...<sup>30</sup>

[Meanwhile there was no end to the barbs flung by their naked enemies, which dragged our miserable citizens from the walls and smashed them on the ground... What more? Our citizens fled the high wall and the towns.]

Bede takes these lines and further reinforces the sense of direct opposition between the British and their attackers, transforming Gildas' 'miserrimi cives' (wretched citizens) into warriors defending northern Britain. He presents them not just as warriors, however, but as warriors whose cowardice was their downfall. Recast in the role of armed defenders, rather than civilians (perhaps reflecting the many synonyms for 'warrior' and 'man' in Old English), their defeat is all the more shameful. Bede writes that:

Ignauī propugnatores miserrime de muris tracti solo adlidebantur. quid plura? relictis ciuitatibus ac muro fugiunt disperguntur.

27 Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', p. 28; for a study of some of the other ways in which Bede approached the *De Excidio*, see Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', pp. 241–61.

28 Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*', p. 5.

29 Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England*, pp. 15–16.

30 *De Excidio* chap. 19 (p. 95).

[The cowardly defenders were wretchedly dragged from the walls and dashed to the ground. In short, they deserted their cities, fled from the wall, and were scattered.]<sup>31</sup>

In these lines their failure to defend the wall, and their towns, is a consequence of their moral frailty, rather than the impossibility of defending the land effectively against invasion. From here, Bede goes on to describe the fate of the towns directly after his description of the *adventus Saxonum*. Although his narrative once again draws directly upon Gildas, he makes some slight but significant alterations:

Sic enim et hic agente impio uictore, immo disponente iusto Iudice, proximas quasque ciuitates agrosque depopulans, ab orientali mari usque ad occidentale, nullo prohibente, suum continuauit incendium, totamque prope insulae pereuntis superficiem obtexit. Ruebant aedificia publica simul et priuata, passim sacerdotes inter altaria trucidabantur, praesules cum populis sine ullo respectu honoris ferro pariter et flammis absumebantur, nec erat qui crudeliter interemtis sepulturae traderet. Itaque nonnulli de miserandis reliquiis in montibus comprehensi, acruatim iugulabantur; alii fame confecti procedentes manus hostibus dabant, pro accipiendis alimentorum subsidiis aeternum subituri seruitium, si tamen non continuo trucidarentur; alii transmarinas regiones dolentes petebant; alii perstantes in patria trepidi pauperem uitam in montibus, siluis, uel rupibus arduis suspecta semper mente agebant.

[So here in Britain the just Judge ordained that the fire of their brutal conquerors should ravage all the neighbouring cities and country-side from the east to the western sea, and burn on, with no one to hinder it, until it covered almost the whole face of the doomed island. Public and private buildings fell in ruins, priests were everywhere slain at their altars, prelates and people alike perished by sword and fire regardless of rank, and there was no one left to bury those who had died a cruel death. Some of the miserable remnant were captured in the mountains and butchered indiscriminately; others, exhausted by hunger, came forward and submitted themselves to the enemy, ready to accept perpetual slavery for the sake of food, provided only they escaped being killed on the spot: some fled sorrowfully to lands beyond the sea, while others remained in their own land and led a wretched existence, always in fear and dread, among the mountains and woods and precipitous rocks.]<sup>32</sup>

Little is done to modify the savagery of these invaders and the violence suffered by the British. At the same time, however, Bede strips Gildas' account of several significant elements. Whereas the slaughtered citizens described by Gildas appear as part of a well-defined hierarchy, as the 'praepositis ecclesiae, cum sacerdotibus ac populo' (church leaders, priests and people alike), Bede reports that that 'passim sacerdotes inter altaria

31 HE I. 12 (pp. 44–45). All references to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors.

32 HE I. 15 (pp. 52–53).

trucidabantur' (priests were everywhere slain at their altars). Concerning the rest of the population, he writes that 'praesules cum populis sine ullo respectu honoris ferro pariter et flammis absumebantur' (prelate and people alike perished by sword and fire regardless of rank). This subtle alteration serves to separate the religious leaders of the British from the body of the laity for whom they were responsible. The clergy, having failed to protect the spiritual lives of their flock, are failed by those responsible for protecting their earthly bodies. Bede expresses no sense of loss or grief here; these sinners receive the punishment they deserve. The towns of Britain are no longer temples of God, and there is no sense of the centrality of the sacred altars carefully positioned by Gildas. There remains only the destruction of all structures, private and municipal, and the slaughter of all those who have not fled or submitted to slavery.

What we can take from this, therefore, is that whilst Bede's account of what happened to the urban fabric of Britain in the post-Roman period was largely borrowed from Gildas, it was modified in several ways to cast the British not as defenders in a hopeless situation, but as cowards whose spiritual weakness had led to their justified destruction. The lack of significant alterations to the narrative of the *De Excidio* beyond this suggests that it may have been supported by other accounts circulating in Bede's day, and may even have lent unity to a wide range of traditions concerning the fate of the towns.<sup>33</sup>

### ***The Old English Historia Ecclesiastica***

This same version of events was repeated in the Old English translation of the *Historia* probably undertaken towards the end of the ninth century, despite those tendencies towards omission and reduction that are characteristic of the vernacular version.<sup>34</sup> When it came to translating this episode, the authors of the Old English text remained broadly faithful to Bede's Latin. Describing the attacks of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, they wrote that:

Ne wæs ungelic wræcc þam ðe iu Chaldeas bærndon Hierusaleme weallas and ða cynelican getimbro mid fyre fornaman for ðæs Godes folces synnum. Swa þonne here fram þære arleasan ðeode, hwæðere rihte Godes dome, neh ceastra gehwylce and land forheregeode wæron. Hrran, and feollan cynelico getimbro and anlipie, and gehwær sacerdas and mæssepreostas betwih wibedum wæron slægene and cwyldre: biscopas mid folcum buton ænigre are sceawunge ætgaedere mid iserne and lige fornumene wæron. And ne wæs ænig se ðe bebyrgnesse sealde þam ðe swa hreowlice acwealde wæron. And monige ðære earman lafe on westenum fangene wæron and heapmælum sticode. Sume for

33 Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, p. 20; Reynolds, 'What Do We Mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?', p. 401; McNamara, 'Bede's Role in Circulating Legend in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', pp. 61–62, 67. On the construction of 'Anglo-Saxon' identity see also Foot, 'The Making of Angelcynn'.

34 Discenza, 'The Old English *Bede* and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority', p. 80; Godden, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths', p. 55.

hungre heora feondum on hand eodon and ecne þeowdom geheton, wiðþon þe him mon andlifne forgefe: sume ofer sæ sarigende gewiton: sume forhtiende in eðle gebidon, and þearfende lif in wuda and in westenum and in hean cleofum sorgiende mode symle dydon.<sup>35</sup>

[Their wrath was not unlike that of the Chaldeans when they burned the walls of Jerusalem, and destroyed with fire that royal building for the sins of God's people. Thus it was that here by this impious people (although it was by the righteous judgment of God) nearly every city and land was laid waste. Buildings both public and private crumbled and fell, and everywhere priests and clergymen were slain and killed at their altars; bishops and people without any mercy together with sword and flame were slaughtered. And there was none who in burial consigned to earth those who were so grievously slaughtered. And many of those wretched survivors were seized in the wastes, and pierced in heaps. Some for their hunger went into the hands of the enemies, and were condemned to eternal servitude, that they be given sustenance in return: others in sorrow went over the sea: some endured fearfully in their homeland, and a wretched life in the woods, and in the wastes, and in high places with grieving hearts lived out their lives.]

Aside from confirming the authority of Bede's account, first given its royal seal of approval in the eighth century, this passage confirms its newfound authority in the vernacular at the time of Alfred and his inheritors in the late ninth and tenth century, the period in which the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was begun, and the majority of Old English poetry was written down.

Perhaps due to the influence that Bede exerted over later medieval historians,<sup>36</sup> Gildas' descriptions of both the assault on Hadrian's Wall, and the destruction of the cities of Britain, also made their way into Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *De gestis Britonum*, effectively book-ending some of the more colourful descriptions of the Arthurian wars, and from there went on to become part of the history of Britain until well into the last century, and arguably — in popular consciousness at least — until the present day.<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey writes that while unenthusiastic farmers manned Hadrian's Wall, worrying constantly about their fate:

interea non cessant uncinata hostium tela, quibus miserrimum uulgus de muris trahebatur et solo allidebatur... Quid plura? Relictis ciuitatibus muroque celso, iterum ciuibus fugae...<sup>38</sup>

35 OEHE 1. 15 (pp. 52–54). All references from *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Miller.

36 Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian', p. 397.

37 Hills, *Origins of the English*, p. 35.

38 All references to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain, an Edition and Translation of 'De gestis Britonum'*, ed. by Reeve and Wright; *De gestis Britonum* VI (p. 114).

[meanwhile there was no end to the barbs flung by their enemies, which dragged the wretched common folk from the wall and smashed them on the ground ... What more? The citizens deserted the high wall and fled the towns.]

Gildas' words here, repeated by Bede, are echoed once again by Geoffrey. Here too we see the wall, the barbs of savage enemies, and the tearing down of the people of Britain as a metaphor for the destruction of Britain itself. Later, describing the ruin of the cities of Britain, the role of the Saxons is occupied by the African King Gormundus and the 'centum sexaginta milibus Affricanorum' (one hundred and sixty thousand Africans), who subject the towns and their inhabitants to fire and the sword after lighting a great fire that burns the fields of Britain from sea to sea:

ita ut cunctae coloniae crebris arietibus omnesque coloni cum sacerdotibus ecclesiae, mucronibus undique micantibus ac flammis crepitantibus simul humi sternerentur.<sup>39</sup>

[so it was that all the towns, by relentless battering rams, and all the people along with the priests of their churches, as swords flashed on all sides, and flames crackled, were together razed to the ground.]

Here Geoffrey reinstates the battering rams of Gildas (which Bede had omitted), perhaps because he was more familiar with siege warfare and engines than Bede, but otherwise retains those elements which had been important to his predecessors. Once again, albeit in far less detail, we see the destruction of the towns, the people, the priests and their churches, falling prey to hostile blades and flames; there is little on Geoffrey's part to suggest that this version of events is anything other than accurate.

### **Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos***

One final piece of evidence from the early eleventh century confirms the influence of this mythology of urban destruction throughout the period. In Wulfstan of York's most famous homily, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which was probably written and revised over the period c. 1010–1016, he admonished his congregation for their various moral failings in terms similar to those borrowed by Gildas from Old Testament prophets. Wulfstan warned that unless they addressed their moral failings, their suffering at the hands of the Danes would match the miseries endured by the British. He wrote that:

An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum, Gildas hatte. Se awrat be heora misdædum hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle. And þæt wæs geworden, þæs þe he sæde, þurh ricra reafac and þurh gitsunge wohgestreona, ðurh leode unlaga and þurh wohdomas, ðurh biscopa asolcennesse and þurh lyðre yrhðe Godes bydela þe soþes geswugedan ealles to gelome and clumedan mid

39 *De gestis Britonum* XI (p. 256).



ceafum þær hy scoldan clypian. Þurh fulne ac folces gælsan and þurh oferfylla and mænigfealde synna heora eard hy forworhtan and selfe hy forwurdan. Ac utan don swa us þearf is, warnian us be swilcan; and soþ is þæt ic secge, wyrstan dæda we witan mid Englum þonne we mid Bryttan ahwar gehyrdan.<sup>40</sup>

[There was one advisor of the people in the time of the Britons called Gildas. He wrote about their misdeeds, how they with their sins so excessively angered God that he first let the English army conquer their homeland and destroy the British veteran troop entirely. And that came about, so he said, through robbery by the powerful and through coveting of ill-gotten gains, violations of law by the people and unjust judgments, through the laziness of bishops and through the wicked cowardice of God's ministers who fell silent about the truth all too often, and mumbled when their jaws when they should cry out. Also through foul pride of the people and through gluttony and manifold sins they destroyed their land and they themselves perished. But let us do as is necessary for us, take warning from such a thing — and true is that which I say, worse deeds we know amongst the English than we heard of anywhere amongst the Britons.]

These lines appear towards the very end of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, shortly before Wulfstan reiterates what good Christians *should* do to avoid suffering the same fate as the British. Wulfstan's reference here to Gildas as a 'þeodwita' (advisor of the people) aligns him with his ancient predecessor; both had the same aims, and the known consequences of the *adventus Saxonum* for the British might serve as an effective deterrent for his contemporaries. The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* had all the spiritual ammunition it needed, but in order for Wulfstan's aims to be fully realized, he needed to ensure that it would resonate with his audience's understanding of their perceived ancestors' role in the history of Britain, and the deaths of those who had once inhabited its cities.

These lines do not directly repeat the same story that Gildas and Bede tell about the ruin of the cities of Britain, as Wulfstan's focus throughout the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* is primarily upon the moral failings of his flock, the immanence of the End Times, and the need for repentance. Nevertheless, he is plainly referring to the same narrative when he describes how God had permitted these invaders to annihilate the armies of the British and take control of their 'eard' (homeland). The same story is also reiterated in the final lines of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (lines 65–72) when, in closing, it describes the scale of the violence in 937:

Ne wearð wæl mare  
on þis eiglande æfre gieta  
folces gefylled beforan þisum  
sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,

40 All references to the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* from Wulfstan, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum, pp. 261–75. This direct reference to Gildas appears in the version of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* found in MS Bodleian, Hatton 113.



eald uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider  
 Engle and Seaxe up becoman,  
 ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,  
 wlance wigsmiþas, Wealas ofercoman,  
 eorlas arhwate, eard begeatan.

[There has not been on this island ever yet a greater slaughter of people killed before this time by the sword's edge, as books tell us, and learned scholars, since from the east here up came the Angles and the Saxons, sought Britain over the broad sea, those proud war-smiths, who overcame the British, those victorious warriors, who won this land.]<sup>41</sup>

Wulfstan was writing within a well-established tradition, as these lines from *The Battle of Brunanburh* presuppose, but he was also using Gildas as a known authority in his own work, adding the weight of historical precedent to his state-of-the-nation address. This does not diminish the importance of Bede within this chain, so much as it emphasizes by omission his contribution to Wulfstan's understanding of historical precedent. It is more important, in this context, for Wulfstan to position himself as Gildas's counterpart; the point he makes is that he finds himself in the same situation. The British had recognized the perilous situation in which they found themselves, but had willfully turned away from what they knew to be the righteous course of action. He warns his contemporaries not to do the same.

## Origin Mythologies

Though the fate of the towns was rather less dramatic than the story told by Gildas, it was this version of events, retold by Bede, which became the received history of Britain after Rome. Wulfstan's reference to Gildas reflects the endurance of this narrative throughout the early Middle Ages and beyond, as does its reappearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum*. The next part of this chapter will show that this story was entwined with the mythology of origins derived from Gildas' *De Excidio*, which had been similarly reinvented by Bede. Gildas' description of the destruction of the towns is immediately preceded by his account of the arrival of Anglian, Saxon, and Jutish mercenaries at the invitation of Vortigern:

Tum erumpens grex catulorum de cubili leaenae barbarae, tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus, secundis velis omine auguriisque, quibus vaticinabatur, certo apud eum praesagio, quod ter centum annis patriam, cui proras librabat, insideret, centum vero quinquaginta, hoc est dimidio temporis, saepius vastaret, evectus, primum in orientali parte insulae iubente infausto tyranno terribiles infixit ungues, quasi pro patria pugnaturus sed eam certius impugnaturus.<sup>42</sup>

41 All references to *The Battle of Brunanburh* from *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, pp. 16–20.

42 *De Excidio* chap. 23 (p. 97).

[Then there burst forth a pack of cubs from the lair of the barbarian lioness, in three *keels*, as warships are known in their language. The winds were favourable, and so too the auguries which had foretold, in keeping with a certain prophecy amongst them, that they would live for three centuries in that land towards which their prows were pointed, and that for a hundred and fifty years (that is half the time) they would frequently lay it waste. They first fixed their claws on the eastern part of the island, on the command of the unfortunate tyrant, as if to fight for our country, but really to fight against it.]

It is well known that this mythology of origins was integrated into Bede's *Historia*, albeit in a more dignified form, with no mentions of lions, their claws, or any apparent reliance on pagan omens and auguries.<sup>43</sup> Whilst Bede was certainly treating people whom he regarded as his pagan ancestors as God's vengeance incarnate, it would hardly have been in his interests to credit Gildas' suggestion that these sorts of practices had helped them to the shores of Britannia. In a rather more neutral tone, Bede writes that:

Tunc Anglorum siue Saxonum gens, inuitata a rege praefato, Britanniam tribus longis nauibus aduehitur et in orientali parte insulae iubente eodem rege locum manendi, quasi pro patria pugnatura, re autem uera hanc expugnatura suscepit.

[At that time the race of the Angles or Saxons, invited by Vortigern, came to Britain in three warships and by his command were granted a place of settlement in the eastern part of the island, ostensibly to fight on behalf of the country, but their real intention was to conquer it.]<sup>44</sup>

Taking his lead from the *De Excidio*, this directly precedes the account of how these newcomers went on to lay waste to Britain's towns, and was repeated almost verbatim in the Old English translation:

Ða Angel þeod and Seaxna wæs gelaðod fram þam foresprencenan cyninge, and on Beotone com on þrim myclum scypum and on eastdæle þyses ealondes eardungstowe onfeng þurh ðæs ylcan cyninges bebod, þe hi hider gelaðode, þæt hi sceoldan for heora eðle compian and feohtan.<sup>45</sup>

[Then the Angles and the Saxons were summoned by the aforementioned king, and they came to Britain in three great ships, and in the eastern part of this island received settlements at the behest of the king, who had invited them here, so that they might soldier and fight for their homeland.]

The only significant difference here is that the Old English version of the *Historia* silently omits Bede's mention of his ancestors' ulterior motives when they made the journey across the North Sea. It would hardly have suited the authors of the vernacular to suggest that there was any merit in betraying a formal oath.

43 Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*', p. 21.

44 *HE* 1. 15 (pp. 49–51).

45 *OEHE* 1. 12 (p. 50).

In all other respects this origin mythology, the so-called ‘three ships’ episode, seems to have been firmly integrated into the sense of ethnic identity that Bede sought to promote, and which was perpetuated throughout the period and beyond in much the same fashion as his account of the destruction of the British cities.<sup>46</sup> It also, notably, is found in the version of events given in the various surviving versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 449 (following Bede closely in the Peterborough MS), confirming the important part that this story had to play in the received narrative of settlement and conquest.<sup>47</sup> Chronicle (MS E) describes how:

Her Matianus and Ualentinus onfengon rice and rixadon . vii. wintra; and on þeora dagum gelaðode Wyrtegeorn Angelcin hider, and hi þa coman on þrim ceolum hider to Brytene on þam stede Heopwinesfleet.<sup>48</sup>

[Here Martianus and Valentinian succeeded to the kingdom and ruled for 7 years; and in their days Vortigern summoned the Angle-kin here, and they then came in three ships here to Britain at the place of Ebba’s Creek.]

As Nicholas Howe argued in *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, this account formed an integral part of later mythologies of origins.<sup>49</sup> The authority of this story was established in the writings of Gildas, maintained by Bede, and given a royal seal of approval through its inclusion in the Chronicle and the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Gildas, Bede, and the Old English *Historia* all repeat the same story about the fate of the towns. Similarly, *The Battle of Brunanburh* poet and Wulfstan of York, although they do not refer to this destruction, nevertheless repeat elements drawn from the same narrative, albeit to suit different ends. In the light of this evidence, it seems logical to conclude that these stories of origin, and of ruin, were closely linked. The *Historia*, promulgated under royal authority, became an established version of events in the late 730s, likely according with (if not uniting) accounts circulating orally in the preceding decades. What we can now recognize is that the mythology of origins it promoted extended beyond the ‘three ships’ motif, and the massacre and displacement of the British, allotting the ancestors of Bede’s Angles, Saxons, and Jutes a central role in the destruction of the towns of Roman Britain.

## Roman Buildings in the Exeter Book Elegies

Early-Saxon England was non-urban, in the sense that there was no ‘town life’ to speak of, even if there continued to be life *in* towns on a vastly reduced scale.<sup>50</sup>

46 Hines, ‘The Becoming of the English’, pp. 50–51; Fanning, ‘Bede, *Imperium*, and the Bretwaldas’, p. 26; Cowdrey, ‘Bede and the “English People”’, p. 501; Brooks, *Bede and the English*, p. 5.

47 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. by Swanton, p. 13.

48 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS. E*, ed. by Irvine, p. 16.

49 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*.

50 Vince, ‘Saxon Urban Economies’, p. 109; Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 11; Hill, ‘The Origins of the Saxon Towns’, p. 174; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 122; Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City*, pp. 22, 37, 41.

Whilst some towns may have continued to serve some regional function as administrative centres, or ‘central places’, they were not occupied to the same extent that they had been during the Roman period.<sup>51</sup> The presence of so-called ‘dark earth’ in the former towns, which is generally thought to result from waste material produced by agriculture, has been interpreted by some as evidence of continued occupation, indicating that there may have been a change in their function rather than ‘sudden abandonment’.<sup>52</sup> Whilst it has often been suggested, as a consequence, that the area within walled Roman towns may have been given over to farming in the sub-Roman and early-Saxon period, if not wholly abandoned, this certainly does not seem to have taken place everywhere. It is worth noting Neil Faulkner’s observation that a ‘minimal accumulation of topsoil’ would have been necessary ‘on a waste ground of rubble’ for such areas of land to have attracted the interest of medieval farmers.<sup>53</sup> Certain areas of intramural space may have been decidedly less suited to agriculture than others, and filled with Roman ruins that were precarious, crumbling, and still decaying throughout the early Middle Ages; many still are fifteen centuries later. Thus, whilst these places may not have been entirely uninhabited wastelands, and may have experienced some degree of continued occupation (as well as being symbolic centres for those in power), it is not surprising that there is little written evidence to suggest that early-Saxon settlements flourished within their walls.

Representations of Roman settlements in Old English literature (as well as other stone-built structures like barrows) are well known to scholars working in many areas of early medieval studies. The most famous descriptions of dilapidated Roman settlements are found amongst the Exeter Book elegies. *The Ruin*, a poem whose narrative oscillates between describing the current dilapidated state of an abandoned city, built in stone, and its imagined glorious past, is often used (and misused) to represent early attitudes towards these places, sometimes without much sensitivity.<sup>54</sup> Archaeologists, historians, and literary scholars alike continue to share a fixation with identifying the ‘actual’ place this poem describes, though some of the latter have tended to prefer allegorical interpretations, and sidestep any direct connection with settlements in the landscape.<sup>55</sup> Some textual scholars have shown as little concern for the misuse of archaeological evidence to justify their interpretations as some archaeologists have shown for the nuances of Old English poetry, and

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51 Hill, ‘Continuity from Roman to Medieval’, p. 299; Arnold, *Roman Britain to Saxon England*, p. 24; Reece, ‘Town and Country’, p. 88. Ken Dark has similarly argued that Romano-British villas may have functioned as the centres of rural estates during this period. See Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 25–39; see also discussion in Speed, *Towns in the Dark?*.

52 Macphail, ‘Soil and Botanical Studies of the “Dark Earth”’, pp. 325–27; Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking*, pp. 8–9; Arnold, *Roman Britain to Saxon England*, pp. 30–31; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 103; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 15–17; Carver, *Underneath English Towns*, pp. 42–43; Bateman and others, *London’s Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 95.

53 Faulkner, ‘Change and Decline in Late Romano-British Towns’, p. 28.

54 Abram, ‘In Search of Lost Time’, p. 23. See also discussion in Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 155–62.

55 Fell, ‘Perceptions of Transience’, p. 179.

this will continue to be the case, no doubt, for as long as *The Ruin* commands the attention of both parties.

It is clear from the beginning of *The Ruin* that its subject is a large settlement, rather than a villa or farm, and that its walls are made of stone. The settlement has been most commonly associated with the Roman town *Aquae Sulis* (modern Bath) due to the poem's references to 'burnsele' (bath houses, 21), 'hate on hrepre' (hot at the heart, 41), and 'hate streamas' (hot streams, 43) passing over 'harne stan' (grey stone, 43) and down to 'þær þa baþu wæron' (where the baths were, 46).<sup>56</sup> A possibility hitherto unconsidered, if one insists on making such connections, is that the word 'hringmere' (45) found here, an hapax legomenon generally translated as 'circular pool', might also be translated as 'ring-pool', namely a pool filled with treasures.<sup>57</sup> This could feasibly (but is unlikely to) refer to the reservoir enclosure from which the hot water at Bath emanated: the hot spring into which votive offerings to Sulis Minerva were cast by Romans and Britons alike. Though this feature may have been known in the early Middle Ages, the pool is likely to have been clogged with silt by the time Bath Abbey was founded nearby.<sup>58</sup> Although baths were a common features of Roman settlements, their purpose may not have been obvious without the knowledge that they had one been 'hate on hrepre'. The 'hate streamas' found in this poem could only have been present if they were naturally occurring, as the Old English word *streamas* indicates natural rather than human-made features.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, *hate* indicates that this water is 'hot' rather than 'warm', an adjective which in an urban Romano-British context might only be reasonably applied to the waters at Bath.<sup>60</sup>

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- 56 Cunliffe, 'Earth's Grip Holds Them', pp. 76–80; Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered*, p. 11; Cunliffe, *English Heritage Book of Roman Bath*, p. 118; Cunliffe, *Roman Bath Discovered*, p. 214.
- 57 Other early commentators, like Stephen Herben, did not think this suggested the archaeology of Bath, insistent as he was that the subject of *The Ruin* was most probably a fort on Hadrian's Wall; see Herben, 'The Ruin, Again', p. 73. Cunliffe has taken *hringmere* to indicate a separate bath from those found in the main complex; see Cunliffe, 'Earth's Grip Holds Them', p. 78. See also Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 156–57.
- 58 Cunliffe, *English Heritage Book of Roman Bath*, p. 47. For the full catalogue of objects and treasures recovered from the sacred spring, see Cunliffe, ed., *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*.
- 59 As Bessinger's concordance demonstrates, *stream* was used to indicate natural rather than human-made features. See Bessinger, *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, p. 1097. This is supported by Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, pp. 926–27; 'stream [...] a stream, current, flowing water'. Herben also disputed the accepted reading of this word, arguing that early medieval people were likely to have recognised the function of a hypocaust and a caldarium, which is perhaps rather generous; Herben, 'The Ruin', p. 39.
- 60 *Hate* is used to describe hot temperatures (such as the extreme heat of Hell (*Christ and Satan* 192, 280)), for example, rather than mere warmth. See other examples in Bessinger, *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, pp. 532–33. The most relevant senses offered by the Toronto Dictionary of Old English are as follows: *hāt* adj. 1. 'hot; having or characterized by a high temperature', i.a. 'of the warmth of the sun'; 1.b. 'of fire, or something burning or glowing'; 1.c. 'of something heated by the sun, fire, etc.' <www.doe.utoronto.ca/> [accessed 6. 12. 2018]. Gallois attests the temperature of the water at Bath; Gallois, 'The Formation of the Hot Springs at Bath Spa, UK', p. 741. All references to *Christ and Satan* from *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, pp. 135–58.

On the basis of archaeological details in the poem which match particular features of the sub-Roman city, Barry Cunliffe has argued that *The Ruin* is most likely to have been composed at some point during the eighth century by a monk associated with the ecclesiastical foundation in Bath, although Peter Davenport has suggested that the late seventh is also a possibility.<sup>61</sup> Whilst the authenticity of the foundation charter for Bath Abbey is questionable, as it survives only as a twelfth-century copy, Patrick Sims-Williams' convincing comparison of the existing foundation charter with another seventh-century charter of 'undoubted authenticity (S 1167)', suggests that whilst the foundation charter of Bath Abbey is not entirely genuine, its details are broadly correct in so far as the grant of land to Abbess Berta in 675 is concerned.<sup>62</sup>

There is no reason, however, why this poem should necessarily refer to a real place at all, however conveniently some of its details may intersect with the archaeology of Bath if approached in a certain way.<sup>63</sup> The fluidity of this text naturally appeals to the detective impulses (and romantic tendencies) of scholars whose imaginations are stoked by the fragmentary details of a single severely damaged leaf in a book full of riddles.<sup>64</sup> Although the poem may have some relationship with Bath, it does not need to be read in this way to appreciate what it can tell us about the early-Saxon experience of Roman towns, nor is it ultimately necessary or possible to affix its details to a single point in time or space.<sup>65</sup> There is no reason why those details that have been used to connect it with one place or another should not be interpreted metaphorically, symbolically, or allegorically. It is important to be mindful of the multivalencies of Old English poetry, and the process of circulation that texts went through before being fixed in manuscript form, potentially reaching a variety of audiences who may have understood them in various different ways. Additionally, many works would have continued to circulate orally for some time after these manuscripts were written, finding fresh contexts and audiences for recitation, before disappearing or laying the foundations for something new. Works like *The Ruin* were the product of lifetimes spent living in a landscape that was strewn with deserted Roman towns, villas, and forts, and the remains of crumbling stone buildings.<sup>66</sup> What the inclusion of this poem in the Exeter Book MS represents is the replication and endorsement by its compilers and copyists of a set of attitudes towards Roman settlements that must have been common in early medieval England, and for this

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61 Cunliffe, *Roman Bath Discovered*, p. 213; Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered*, pp. 11–13; Cunliffe, 'Saxon Bath', pp. 349–50. Wentersdorf also supported an eighth century dating in 'Observations on *The Ruin*'.

62 Sims-Williams, 'Continental Influence at Bath Monastery', p. 2.

63 Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, p. 158.

64 Renou, 'The Old English *Ruin*', pp. 148–49. More or less a single page, that is, with the second line beginning folio 124'.

65 Thompson Lee, '*The Ruin*: Bath or Babylon?'; Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', pp. 32–33.

66 Rosenthal, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History', p. 7; Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', p. 36.

reason found a place in ‘the common stock of poetic formulas and themes’ found in Old English poetry.<sup>67</sup>

The representation of buildings in *The Ruin* makes it clear that the sense of loss and otherness they perpetuated was at least partially a result of their grand scale and stone construction:

Wrætlic is þes wealstan,    wyrde gebræcon,  
burgstede burston;    broснаð enta geweorc.  
Hrofas sind gehrorene,    hreorge torras,  
hrungeat berofen    hrim on lime,  
scearde scurbeorge    scorene, gedrorene,  
ældo undereotone.<sup>68</sup>

[Splendid is this wallstone, fate-broken, the city buildings burst apart, the work of giants crumbled. The rooves are collapsed, the towers tumbled, the barred gate broken and frost in the plaster, ceilings agape, torn, collapsed, and consumed with age.]

(*The Ruin* 1–6)

These first six lines present the reader with many of the elements that characterized Roman towns, as well as describing the process of their destruction. The first line establishes the pattern for what follows, serving in one stroke to edify the ‘wealstan’ in the listener’s mind, before abruptly sweeping it to the ground. The process of construction comes first, before people appear, and when at last we see human figures, they are described in terms that emphasize their alterity, as giants. These building stones, once shaped by skilful masons, are now grasped by different hands:

Eorðgrap hafað  
waldendwyrhtan    forweorone, geleorene,  
heardgripe hrusan,    oþ hund cnea  
werþeoda gewitan.

[The grasp of the earth, the firm grip of the ground, now holds the earthly builders, the ones decayed and gone, until a hundred generations have passed away.]

(*The Ruin* 6–9)

The landscape of the poem is balanced at a still point, frozen in time, with *hrim on lime* (‘frost in the plaster,’ 4), after the passing away of a ‘hund cnea’ (hundred generations, 8), a phrase which can, to the minds of contemporaries, have only suggested the whole history of mankind — King Alfred, for one, counted fewer

67 *The Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, pp. 61–62; the contrary had previously been argued in Hume, ‘The “Ruin-Motif” in Old English Poetry’.

68 All references to *The Ruin* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 357–58.



than fifty generations between himself and Adam.<sup>69</sup> Thus the ruined city, as Derrida writes, deprived of human life, the ‘living energy of meaning’, appears only as the skeleton of social order, still haunted by the ghosts of ‘meaning and culture’, with its stones encapsulating ‘both the possibility and the fragility of its existence’.<sup>70</sup> The description of the fallen wall that follows these opening lines compounds the sense of the inescapable collapse of all humans and the things they create for themselves, implying the inevitability of the urban landscape’s present state of ruin, bereft of human activity.

Oft þæs wag gebad,  
ræghar ond readfah, rice æfter oþrum,  
ofstonden under stormum; steap geap gedreas.

[Always this wall endured, grey with lichen and marked in red, one kingdom after another, and stood firm against storms; but now the high arch has fallen.]

(*The Ruin* 9–11)

These lines are focused entirely upon the creation and endurance of the wall until the final word of line 11, which sets ‘gebad’ firmly in opposition to ‘gedreas’. It rises course upon course in the reader’s mind; it is in some way marked by red and grey, it has endured the rise and fall of countless kingdoms; it has stood strong against the elements; it is high; it is arched — but now it has fallen. Despite the apparent destruction of the wall, and although little can be said about lines 12–17 due to the state of the manuscript, it is difficult to escape the sense that the reconstruction of this wall in the mind’s eye celebrates the triumph of the human imagination over the elements, notwithstanding the fragility of the material world.<sup>71</sup>

By the time a sufficiently undamaged poem re-emerges on the page, the poet’s attention returns to walls for the third time in twenty lines, considering the manner of their construction:

Mod monade myneswiftne gebrægd  
hwætred in hringas, hygerof gebond  
weall walanwirum wundrum togædre.

[The spirit prompted to quick action sharp-witted and resolute builders skilled in circular building, who wondrously secured the rampart with iron clamps.]

(*The Ruin* 18–20)

69 *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, pp. 1–4.

70 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Bass, pp. 5–6.

71 Klinck and Muir’s editions both provide as many words for these damaged lines as they possibly can, but it is probably unwise to ground an interpretation too firmly in these fragments. For further details see *The Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, pp. 211–14; *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 701–02.



These lines have been taken to refer to the sort of iron wall clamps (seated in lead) with which Roman masons secured their building blocks.<sup>72</sup> This reference, immediately preceding a description of ‘meodoheall monig, mondreama full’ (many mead halls, filled with the joys of men, 23), has been taken to echo the practice of gift exchange that was an essential part of warrior culture, in which the giving of high-status gifts (often made from precious metals) played a vital role in binding together social groups.<sup>73</sup> The implication is that the binding together of human society is understood to be an essential part of what also binds together settlements; the relationship between the two will be encountered repeatedly throughout the course of this study. Without the hall-joys that are described in lines 32–37, of which treasure giving and the ritual consumption of alcoholic drink were an integral part, society could not endure — and in this case has not endured. When the buildings, their builders, and their inhabitants fell, they did so together as part of a unified body:

Crungon walo wide; cwoman woldagas.  
Swylt eall fornóm secgrofra wera.  
Wurdon hyra wigsteal westen staþolas.  
Brosnade burgsteall, betend crungon,  
hergas to hrusan.

[Walls fell widely, and days of pestilence came. And so too fell all of those brave men. Their places of war became places of waste. The stronghold crumbled, and its builders fell, its armies to earth.]

(*The Ruin* 25–29)

Although the poem recalls elements of the Roman past, presented through the lens of Old English poetry, it is difficult to conclude that the ruins of the city in its present state evoke any theme other than *sic transit gloria mundi*.<sup>74</sup>

Comparable references to Roman ruins appear in *The Wanderer*.<sup>75</sup> However, whereas *The Ruin* invites reflection on the city’s glorious past, Christine Fell noted that ‘ruins, for this poet, only serve to call up thoughts of death.’<sup>76</sup> The ruins described in *The Wanderer* occupy a far less geographically specific context than those of *The Ruin*, and one hears less about the specific functions they served whilst still occupied.<sup>77</sup> Equally, the timeless setting of the poem’s action, a ‘meaningless present’ as Martin Green puts it, has not encouraged scholars to attach it to any particular place with quite the same conviction

72 The same kind that were removed by those who plundered the shrines at *Aquae Sulis* for building materials, as Cunliffe and Davenport have both noted. See Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered*, p. 34; Barry Cunliffe, *English Heritage Book of Roman Bath*, p. 117.

73 See further discussion of halls and ring-giving in Chapter 3, pp. 83–91.

74 Abram, ‘In Search of Lost Time’, p. 25.

75 See also discussion in Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 163–68.

76 Fell, ‘Perceptions of Transience’, p. 180.

77 Dunleavy, ‘A *De Excidio* Tradition in the Old English *Ruin*?’.

as *The Ruin*.<sup>78</sup> In *The Wanderer*, such images of destruction appear mainly in the second half of the poem,<sup>79</sup> as the narrator considers the current state of the world around him:<sup>80</sup>

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið  
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,  
swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard  
winde biwaune weallas stondaþ,  
hrime bihrorene, hryðge þa ederas.  
Woniað þa winsalo, waldend licgað  
dreame bidrorene, duguð eal gecrong,  
wlonc bi wealle.<sup>81</sup>

[The wise man will perceive how terrible it is when all this world stands in waste, as now in various places throughout this middle earth, wind-blown, walls stand, frost-covered, ruined buildings. The wine halls crumble, leaders lie lifeless, deprived of joys, the troop all fallen, proud by the wall.]

(*The Wanderer* 73–80)

In contrast with *The Ruin*, however, the destruction of the earthly foundation here is more explicitly the work of God. When the end does come, it is:

Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda Scyppend  
oþ þæt burgwara breahmta lease  
eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.

[Just as in days of old the creator of man destroyed this earth, so that, lacking the joyful sounds of men, the ancient works of giants stood empty.]

(*The Wanderer* 85–87)

It is his meditation on these ruined buildings, devoid of human life and rendered so grimly 'idel', together with his reflection on the death of their erstwhile occupants (80–84), that finally impels the speaker onwards to the *ubi sunt* section of the poem in which he laments the loss of horse, rider, treasure giving, feasting, and hall-joys (92–96).<sup>82</sup> These are all, notably, the same symbolic objects whose absence is mourned in *The Ruin*. The wanderer now occupies a time in which all has 'genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære' (passed under the shadow of night, as if it had never been, *The Wanderer* 96).

There is one further feature of this landscape, closely linked with these ruined buildings, that attracts not only the attention of the speaker, but has also fascinated numerous commentators.

78 Green, 'Man, Time, and Apocalypse in *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Beowulf*', p. 284.

79 Clark and Wasserman, 'The Imagery of *The Wanderer*', p. 294.

80 Green, 'The Twilight Kingdom', p. 447.

81 All references to *The Wanderer* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 215–19.

82 For further discussion of the importance of enclosures and walls, see Cook, 'Woriað þa winsalo'.

Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe  
 weal wundrum heah wýrmlícum fah.  
 Eorlas fornomon asca þryþe,  
 wæpen wælgifru, wýrd seo mære,  
 and þas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað.

[There stands now in the track of the beloved retinue a wall wondrously high, decorated with serpent patterns. But the strong, slaughter-greedy spear and mighty fate removed those warriors, and storms now clash against these stony slopes.]

(*The Wanderer* 97–101)

One of the principal interests of critics here has been the patterns that decorate, mark, or stain the wall in some *wýrmlíc* way.<sup>83</sup> Whilst there have been sensible suggestions that these are serpentine paintings or carvings, other more imaginative explanations have included the burrowing of engraver beetles, patterns of herringbone masonry, and the intricate patterns of designs adorning barrow-stones.<sup>84</sup> The reference to wind-blown walls as ‘*enta geweorc*’ in line 87 indicates that this wall should probably be understood as part of a Roman stone building, which would account for its impressive stature and long endurance. However, as the specific nature of these patterns is not fixed, it seems most likely that they are intended to evoke contrasting (and simultaneous) images of splendour and desolation, decoration and ruination, as is the case elsewhere in *The Wanderer*, and indeed a number of other Old English poems.

Similarly obscure decoration marks the aforementioned wall ‘*ræghar*’ and ‘*readfah*’ (stained red and grey, *The Ruin* 10). As the reasons for this feature are not explained by the poet, it has been suggested that it may refer to lichens, oxidation caused by the mineral content of the waters at Bath, or red plaster.<sup>85</sup> This wall, in a similar fashion to the wall *wundrum heah* in *The Wanderer*, ‘*gebad [...]* rice æfter oþrum, ofstonden under stormum; steap geap gedreas’ (endured [...] one kingdom after another, stood under storms; yet now that high wall itself has fallen, *The Ruin* 9–11). In his commentary on a ‘Typical Set of Symbols Illustrating the Process of Transformation’, specifically a process of psychological rebirth, Jung drew attention to a great iron wall in the 18<sup>th</sup> surah of the Quran constructed by Dhul-Qarnayn to defend against the ravages of the same Gog and Magog who appear in the Book of Revelation 20.7.<sup>86</sup> Although the wall offers defence against Gog and Magog for the time being, at the end of days it will be broken down. Jung suggested that the people

83 Richardson, ‘The Hero at the Wall in *The Wanderer*’, p. 283.

84 French, ‘The Wanderer 98: *Wýrmlícum Fah*’, p. 527; Millns, ‘The Wanderer 98’, p. 434; Dean, ‘*Weal wundrum heah, wýrmlícum fah*’, p. 143.

85 Earle was the first to suggest that this ‘red’ may have been due to the stains of iron oxidation; see Earle, ‘An Ancient Saxon Poem of a City in Ruins Supposed to be Bath’. Red plaster, where it survives, is a fairly common feature of Roman ruins.

86 Jung, *Four Archetypes*, trans. by Hull, pp. 95–97; Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, pp. 304–05.

protected by the wall, the 'beloved city', should be seen as broadly representative of the self. A parallel may be seen between this people and the departed *dugub* of *The Wanderer*. This process of individuation is:

...an *opus contra naturam*, which creates a *horror vacui* [...] only too likely to collapse under the impact of the collective forces of the psyche [...] But there will come a time when, in accordance with Allah's providence, even the iron rampart will fall to pieces, namely, on the day when the world comes to an end, or psychologically speaking, when individual consciousness is extinguished in the waters of darkness, that is to say when a subjective end of the world is experienced. By this is meant the moment when consciousness sinks back into the darkness from which it originally emerged [...] the moment of death.<sup>87</sup>

This moment has already occurred in both *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*. A hundred generations have passed, walls stand wind-blown, and all the world lies at the mercy of a harsh winter that shares much in common with the apocalyptic Norse *fimbulvetr*.<sup>88</sup> From this point onwards, the driving force of *The Wanderer* becomes the will to carry us past this point, towards the 'are' (grace, 114) and 'frofre' (comfort, 115) that may only be found *post mortem* in the security of heaven.

What is emphasized by this wall, and those ruins found in *The Wanderer*, *The Ruin*, and elsewhere, is their apparent lack of function in the world of the living as anything other than a *memento mori*, calling to mind the joys of human society in both the present and past, as well as the inevitable deaths of those who had once enjoyed their embrace, and those who now look upon their ruin. Significantly (and this is perhaps a point that has been insufficiently emphasized by previous commentators), both of these texts show an understanding and appreciation of the role that buildings and settlements had played in the life of their insular predecessors, as well as a direct reflection, by implication, of the role that their own buildings and settlements played in their own lives.

## Roman Buildings in *Andreas*

There is one further example of a ruined city in the Old English poetic corpus that requires attention before we move on to consider the forms of rural settlements in early medieval England and their representation (or lack thereof) in documentary sources.<sup>89</sup> This is the city of Mermedonia in *Andreas*, a work that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, where I argue that the poet engages in a process of spoliative processing with the specific aim of encouraging new attitudes towards

87 Jung, *Four Archetypes*, p. 96.

88 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Faulkes, p. 49; see also Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Hall, p. 83.

89 The following is also discussed in Bintley, 'Demythologising Urban Landscapes', and *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley, pp. 81–96. See also Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 104–11.

intramural space. However, the depiction of Mermedonia is also directly relevant to the discussion here, as its stone-built structures are drawn from the same stock of images used to describe Roman buildings in the elegies.

*Andreas* describes the apocryphal journey of St Andrew to rescue St Matthew from the clutches of the anthropophagic heathen Mermedonians, who inhabit a city replete with stone walls, towers, gates, and other buildings.<sup>90</sup> After freeing Matthew and other victims of the Mermedonians, Andrew — having revealed his identity — is tortured and imprisoned. When he subsequently appeals to the grace of God from the confines of his jail cell, a torrent of water bursts out of a pillar, cleansing Mermedonia, and symbolically baptizing its inhabitants. The narrative of the poem closely follows that of its analogues, and a lost source which Robert Boenig thought most likely to have been a Latin version of the Greek *Praxeis*, an apocryphal life of St Andrew closely related to the Latin Casanatensis version and an Old English translation in the Blickling Homilies.<sup>91</sup> The *Andreas* poet is also likely to have drawn upon *Beowulf*. Summarizing more recent scholarship on connections between the two, Orchard notes that the ‘sheer number of parallels’, as well as their ‘extensive nature’, strongly suggests that more is at work in the relationship between the two poems than a simple reliance upon a common poetic stock.<sup>92</sup> The last sustained objection to the idea that there is a direct connection between the two was penned by Leonard Peters, who rightly noted that formulaic phrases in *Andreas* appear in poems other than *Beowulf*, but who also failed to consider the context of these parallels in any detail.<sup>93</sup> *Andreas* is, then, a poem which is anchored not only in the tradition of the European and North African texts which are its direct analogues, but also in the vernacular Old English heroic poetic tradition.

In the first description of Mermedonia, the city is presented in similar terms to ruins in the Exeter Book elegies, emphasizing certain aspects of its physical makeup:

Onwoc þa wiges heard, wang sceawode  
fore burggeatum; beorgas steape,  
hleodū hlifodon, ymbe harne stan  
tigelfagan trafu, torras stodon,  
windige weallas.<sup>94</sup>

90 On ‘anthropophagy’ and ‘cannibalism’ see Castro-Klarén, ‘Parallaxes: Cannibalism and Self-Embodiment’.

91 See discussion in *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley; also *The Acts of Andrew*, trans. by Boenig, pp. v–ix; *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by Krapp, p. xxxvi; Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 173. David Hamilton agreed to some extent, albeit cautiously; see Hamilton, ‘The Diet and Digestion of Allegory’, p. 147.

92 Orchard, *A Critical Companion to ‘Beowulf’*, pp. 164–66. For further discussion, see also Riedinger, ‘The Formulaic Relationship Between *Beowulf* and *Andreas*’; and Hamilton, ‘*Andreas* and *Beowulf*’.

93 Peters, ‘The Relationship of the Old English *Andreas* to *Beowulf*’.

94 All references to *Andreas* from *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley.

[Awoke then the war-hardened, saw the lie of the land before the town's gates; steep mountains, cliffsides rose up, around the hoary rock stood shacks adorned with tiles, towers, windswept walls.]

(*Andreas* 839–43)

Defining features here, as in *The Ruin*, include city gates, tiled rooves, and towers.<sup>95</sup> Notable also is the reference to 'windy walls', strongly reminiscent of those left standing deserted and 'winde biwaune' (wind-blown, *The Wanderer* 76) in *The Wanderer*.<sup>96</sup> Later, during the scene of Andrew's torture by the Mermedonians, we see more of the urban landscape:

Drogon deormode æfter duns-cræfum,  
ymb stanhleoðo stærcedferþþe,  
efne swa wide swa wegas tolagon,  
enta ærgeweorc, innan burgum,  
stræte stanfage. Storm upp aras  
æfter ceasterhofum, cirm unlytel  
hæðnes heriges.

[The valiant dragged him by ravines in the downs, around the stone cliffs, men of strengthened hearts just as far as the diverse roads extended, once the works of giants within the town, streets paved with stone. A storm rose up through city buildings, no small outcry from the heathen band.]

(*Andreas* 1232–38)

Importantly, the action of this passage appears to take place 'innan burgum' (within the fortifications), in other words within the walls of the city and in an urban setting, as Lori Ann Garner agrees, albeit one which is in a state of disrepair.<sup>97</sup> It is also notable that in both extracts from *Andreas*, the stones from which Mermedonia's buildings were once crafted now occupy at a point of instability between 'culture' and 'nature'. Mermedonia is a place built by human hands, but also one where 'beorgas steape, hleoðu hlifodon' (steep mountains, cliffsides rose up, 840–41), and where Andrew is dragged 'æfter duns-cræfum, ymb stanhleoðo stærcedferþþe' (by ravines in the downs, around the stone cliffs, 1232–33). What we see here is how swiftly a combination of human neglect and the action of the elements can return the landscape to a 'natural' state, transforming walls and buildings back into rocky landscapes — the sort of place where dressed building stones might be found to suit various purposes. This

95 Bintley, 'Demythologising Urban Landscapes'; Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 104–07. Compare with 'hrungeat' (barred gate, *The Ruin* 4): Muir gives *hrungeat* here; Klinck, in *The Old English Elegies*, gives *hringeat*. See further discussion in *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, p. 700.

96 The phrase 'windige weallas' has been taken to refer to the shoreline cliffs (*Beowulf* 572) seen by Beowulf in the first light of morning after his swimming match with Breca, and to Andrew's view of Mermedonia when he awakens outside its gates. All references to *Beowulf* from Klaeber's *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by Fulk, Bjork, and Niles.

97 Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, p. 108.





Figure 2.1. Reused Roman building materials at St Martin's, Canterbury. Photograph: Author.



Figure 2.2. Reused Roman building materials at St Pancras, Canterbury. Photograph: Author.





Figure 2.3. Reused Roman stone at St Andrew's, Wroxeter. Photograph: Author.

is in keeping with the reuse of stone from Roman settlements and buildings for the construction of new buildings throughout the early Middle Ages, a process that was reinvigorated in the sixteenth century following the dissolution of the monasteries.<sup>98</sup> To take two examples at opposite ends of Watling Street, the churches of St Martin and St Pancras, in Canterbury, and St Andrew, at Wroxeter, were partially constructed from this kind of material.

We should perhaps be prepared to recognise other examples in Old English poetry of natural landscape features known in modern times to have been formed without direct human intervention, which may nevertheless have been thought of as human-made (or giant-made) in the early Middle Ages. Natural geological features can just as easily convince modern observers that human hands assisted in their construction as they did ancient peoples.<sup>99</sup> An excellent example of this, thinking

<sup>98</sup> Hunter, 'Germanic and Roman Antiquity', p. 36; Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', p. 29; also Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 94. At York, to give one prominent example, the *principia* site of the Roman city may have served as a quarry for the builders of the cathedral complex; see Norton, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cathedral at York', p. 26; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 67. The same was also true at Gloucester; see Heighway, 'Gloucester and the New Minster of St Oswald', p. 102. The reuse of Roman buildings for religious purposes will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, and the reuse of the Roman walls in Chapter 4.

<sup>99</sup> See discussion in (e.g.) Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*. Underwater geological formations which have also been mistakenly interpreted as the ruins of lost civilisations include the Yonaguni Monument (Japan), the Bimini Road or Bimini Wall (in the Bahamas), and features off the coast of

in terms of *longue durée*, can be seen in the approaches of various peoples over time to the natural stone formations at the summit of Rough Tor, on Bodmin moor. Rough Tor is topped at one end by a huge cairn of stones deposited by glacial drift, and at the other by what seems to be a long wall of complex human design that was also created by natural processes. Rough Tor was a place of settlement and worship from the Neolithic onwards, before its peak was eventually topped by a tiny early medieval church dedicated to St Michael (possibly to conquer its pre-Christian significance), whose ruins now contain a memorial plaque to the war dead of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Wessex Division.<sup>100</sup>

Further evidence of the same idea, that stone buildings would eventually return to the earth from whence they came, can also be seen in the description of the same high wall in *The Wanderer* whose decoration I have already mentioned:

Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe  
 weal wundrum heah, wýrmlicum fah.  
 Eorlas fornoman asca þryþe,  
 wæpen wælgifu, wýrd seo mære,  
 ond þas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað,  
 hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,  
 wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,  
 nipeð nihtscua, norþan onsendeð  
 hreo hæglfare hæleþum on andan.

[There stands now in the track of the beloved veteran retinue a wall wondrously high, decorated with serpent patterns. Hosts of spears took away those noblemen, weapons greedy for slaughter, glorious fate, and storms beat these stony cliffs, falling frost binds the earth, the tumult of winter, then darkness comes, the shadow of night grows dark, and from the north is sent a fierce hailstorm in hostility to men.]

(*Wan* 97–105)

If the stony cliffs battered by storms in these lines are interpreted as the ‘eald enta geweorc’ (ancient work of giants, 87) described earlier in the poem, one can see how, with the passing of the world of humankind, these can be understood as the same ‘winde biwaune weallas’ (wind-blown walls, 76) on which the speaker once gazed. If this is the case, it suggests that the collapse of human civilization, together with its ordering principles of naming and classification, has changed the way in which elements of the landscape are understood. If there is no wanderer to describe walls as walls, then are they still walls? Devoid of human occupation, as they are here, they are no longer stone walls but cliffs, waiting to be swallowed back up into the earth like the treasure buried by the last survivor in *Beowulf*, or the dragon’s hoard when it is finally returned to the earth:

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Zakynthos (Greece).

100 Johnson and Rose, *Bodmin Moor*, p. 46.



Figure 2.4. The walls of the Saxon shore fort at Richborough. Photograph: Author.

Forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan  
gold on greote, þær hit nu gen lifað  
eldum swa unnyt swa hit æror wæs.

[They then gave the treasures of the earls to the earth to hold, the gold into  
the earth, where it lives yet, still as useless to men as it ever was.]

(*Beowulf* 3166–68)

When read in the context of *The Wanderer* this seems to suggest that buildings, like gold, only serve a purpose in human affairs if they play an active part in those social practices that are essential in the binding together of society, such as gift exchange, oath swearing, and ritual feasting. If buildings and settlements serve no purpose in society, even if their prior usage is understood and recognized, then they might as well be piles of scree, rocky cliff-faces, or perilous mountain slopes.

These kinds of approaches to ruined buildings must account, at least in part, for the well-known identification of these Roman structures as ‘*enta geweorc*’ (the work of giants). This term, similarly applied to prehistoric landscape features like barrows and standing stones, is used almost exclusively of architecture outside of *Beowulf* (in which it also refers to metalwork).<sup>101</sup> Without wishing to dwell for too long upon the

101 See discussion in Frankis, ‘The Thematic Significance of *enta geweorc*’.

presence of ‘giants’ in Old English literature, a topic discussed extensively elsewhere, it is important to recognise what ‘enta geweorc’ reveals about the perception of stone buildings. As Howe argued, one of the most important things to recognise about ‘enta geweorc’ is not only that it identifies the builders of these edifices as superhuman in size. ‘Ent’ should also be seen as ‘an ethnographic term not unlike the names of past or mythic tribes that appear in Bede’s *History*: such terms refer to those who came before and left traces that cannot be ignored’. Consequently, as Howe suggested, the presence of these structures in the landscape ‘becomes a cautionary tale as one thinks about the future’, and a reminder that even the greatest and most powerful peoples ultimately face oblivion.<sup>102</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter it is not particularly important that these works may not substantially predate the manuscripts in which they are contained. What they preserve, both in their oral formulaic vocabulary, and in their shared themes and motifs, are the experience of encountering ruins throughout the period. Although attitudes changed over time in response to the development of settlement types and ideas about settlements, traditions like these endured because of the rich opportunities they afforded poets to reflect on themes such as the precarity of the material world. *Andreas* is one such work. As I argue in Chapter 4, the fabric of the city of Mermedonia is drawn from various traditions — Insular and otherwise — that had earlier origins. It is especially important that this poetic tradition should be understood in the context of the discussion earlier in this chapter, concerning the influence of Gildas and Bede’s narrative of urban destruction. It is no coincidence that the poetic tradition, with its abandoned and ruined buildings, is congruent with what was an accepted account of how they came to be this way. As the following chapters will argue, it was a theme with which various authors engaged in one way or another during the slow and decidedly non-linear process by which the early English landscape became partially ‘urbanised’ — a process that was by no means straightforward, nor necessarily inevitable.

## Rural Settlements in Early-Saxon England

The final part of this chapter focuses on rural settlements of the kind that were built from the fifth century onwards in areas under the control of Old English-speaking elites, and what relationship, if any, there may have been between rural settlements and representations of idealized rural landscapes in later Old English literature. This overview, which can only hope to offer a broad and general summary of the characteristics of these settlements and their buildings, will begin by outlining their somewhat nebulous form, and compare these characteristics with descriptions of contemporary and earlier counterparts elsewhere in northern Europe. The principles which governed their layout and organization, which have appeared as disorganized

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102 Howe, ‘The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England’, p. 96.

to modern eyes as they did to urbanized Romans in the first century, were likely a reflection of both social organization and the relationship between these early settlers and their surroundings. The depiction of rural *loci amoeni* (pleasant places) found in texts from the mid-Saxon period onwards may reflect both the Classical and biblical inheritance of these literary works, but also the experience of life in the early medieval landscape.<sup>103</sup>

Jeffrey Cohen has made an important point about wood and stone as cultural signifiers and building materials for these early settlers, in words which that are especially valuable when considered in relation to architecture:

Since these Germanic tribes built their homes, sheep sheds, and mead halls exclusively from wood, stone in their sign system was associated with the primitive and the inert. Wood was a living substance to be carved and joined, the raw material of community; stone was recalcitrant and dead, good for etching runes but otherwise impossible to transform. Like their forebears, the Anglo-Saxons contrasted wood's modernity with the ancient, elemental harshness of stone. Men built with wood. Giants, the vanished race who had ruled the earth in its larger-than-life, Paleolithic days, were architects of stone.<sup>104</sup>

As Michael Shapland has shown, secular buildings in early medieval England were built almost exclusively in timber throughout the period, with the exception of some floor surfaces, whilst the reintroduction of building practices that embraced stone was a slow process mainly associated with the Church.<sup>105</sup> It would be a fundamental error to assume any sort of inferiority because of this, as some scholars of the period have done; it is increasingly being recognized that early medieval English builders were eminently capable, as Mark Gardiner has demonstrated, of constructing large, complex, and ornate timber buildings, particularly towards the end of the period.<sup>106</sup> This cultural orthodoxy was maintained out of choice rather than necessity, and had its origins in building traditions shared with peoples in southern Scandinavia and on the northern Germanic seaboard.

Settlements of the early-Saxon period share some interesting common features with Tacitus' description in the *Germania* of how the 'Germans' set out their villages, even if settlement layouts in England and the continental North Sea regions differed on the ground in a number of important respects, and several centuries separate them.<sup>107</sup> Drawing a comparison with early-Saxon settlements here is in no way

103 As Catherine Clarke has argued, this tradition appears to have formed the basis for depictions of the *locus amoenus* that endured long after the early Middle Ages, throughout the later medieval period, and was to be continued in one form or another throughout the Renaissance and beyond. See discussion in Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England*, pp. 7–66.

104 Cohen, *Of Giants*, p. 5. See also more recent discussion of stone by Cohen in *Stone*.

105 This is discussed in detail in the following chapter. See Shapland, 'Timber as the Secular Building Material of Anglo-Saxon Society'.

106 Gardiner, 'The Sophistication of Late-Saxon Timber Buildings'; Hewitt, 'Anglo-Saxon Carpentry', p. 206.

107 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 94. This is particularly the case regarding the presence of longhouses on the continent and their complete absence from excavations in Britain to date. See also Hamerow, 'Anglo-Saxon Timber Buildings and their Social Context', p. 129; Rahtz, 'Buildings and Rural Settlement', pp. 60–61.

intended to claim continuity in practice. What I wish to draw attention to instead is the way in which those accustomed to living in urban environments, ancient and modern, have been inclined to view the settlements of first century 'Germans', on the one hand, and those of people in fifth and sixth century Britain, on the other. Tacitus is not thought to have ever visited Germany himself, and there is no sense of personal experience in his work, meaning that he must have relied on written and oral accounts for his information.<sup>108</sup> Ronald Mellor argued that written sources, on which he thought Tacitus to have depended 'almost entirely', are likely to have included the *De Bello Gallico* of Caesar, the works of Pliny the Elder, and fragments from Poseidonius.<sup>109</sup> However, as Gudeman demonstrated almost a century earlier, points of similarity between the *Germania* and these works are too few to account for most of its content. If Tacitus relied primarily upon written sources, much must have been derived from Pliny's *Bella Germaniae*, though the loss of this text renders this a moot point.<sup>110</sup> Regardless of his dependence on Pliny or other written sources, it is likely that Tacitus also drew on the experience of those who had travelled in Germania or had contact with its peoples, as well those identified as native 'Germans' in Rome, of whom there were many.<sup>111</sup> Tacitus wrote that:

Nullas Germanorum populis urbes habitari satis notum est, ne pati quidem inter se iunctas sedes. colunt discreti ac diversi, ut fons, ut campus, ut nemus placuit. vicos locant non in nostrum morem conexas et cohaerentibus aedificiis: suam quisque domum spatio circumdat, sive adversus casus ignis remedium sive inscitia aedificandi. ne caementorum quidem apud illos aut tegularum usus: materia ad omnia utuntur informi et citra speciem aut delectationem.<sup>112</sup>

[It is well known that none of the German tribes live in cities, that even individually they do not permit houses to touch each other: they live separated and scattered, as spring-water, meadow, or grove appeals to each man: they lay out their villages not, after our fashion, with buildings contiguous and connected; everyone keeps a clear space round his house, whether it be as a precaution against the chances of fire, or just through ignorance of building. They have not even learned to use quarry-stone or tiles: the timber they use for all purposes is unshaped, and stops short of all ornament or attraction.]

(*Ger.* 16)

There is certainly more than a hint of rustic idealism in this description through which Tacitus seems to imply that the values of these barbarians were more in keeping with those of the old Republic than of his contemporary Rome.<sup>113</sup> Its romanticism has in

<sup>108</sup> Dorey, *Tacitus*, p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Mellor, *Tacitus*, pp. 14–15; Dorey, *Tacitus*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>110</sup> Gudeman, 'The Sources of the *Germania* of Tacitus', p. 111; Syme, *Tacitus*, pp. 127–28.

<sup>111</sup> Mendell, *Tacitus: The Man*, p. 216; Mellor, *Tacitus*, p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> Tacitus, *De Origine et Situ Germanorum*, ed. by Anderson, chap. 16 (p. 154), hereafter *Germania*.

<sup>113</sup> Dudley, *The World of Tacitus*, p. 221; Martin, *Tacitus*, p. 49; see also discussion in Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, pp. 50, 121–22.



the past inspired one scholar to write that ‘what made the German live alone was presumably that native love of independence which compels many an Englishman of today to prefer a country cottage to the comforts of urban life’<sup>114</sup>

Troubling and absurd as this view is in hindsight, more intriguing is the correlation between Tacitus’ observations concerning the apparent disorder of these villages, and those often encountered in modern descriptions of early English rural settlements. Helena Hamerow almost seems to echo Tacitus when she writes that they are ‘frequently so scattered that they scarcely seem to merit the term “village” and have often been described as a kind of shanty town’, appearing somewhat ‘second-rate’ in comparison to their contemporary continental counterparts.<sup>115</sup> In fact, Hamerow writes, these settlements of the early- to mid-Saxon periods have sometimes been ‘so dispersed that some archaeologists have hesitated to call them “villages” at all’.<sup>116</sup> Two of the best-known examples are those at West Stow (Suffolk) and Mucking (Essex), which Peter Addyman defined in his 1972 study as ‘*de novo* villages of the fifth and sixth centuries’.<sup>117</sup> Both of these settlements, in the course of their lifetimes, show signs of having undergone a slow drift across the landscape, as buildings were abandoned or destroyed and their replacements were constructed nearby. Stanley West’s excavations revealed that a series of seven post-built ‘hall’ buildings had been constructed at West Stow, five of which traced a line along the east-west axis of the sandy hillock on which the village was constructed.<sup>118</sup> Hamerow has argued that Mucking also belongs to the same inclusive category of ‘wandering settlements’, arguing that mobility of this kind ‘may have been widespread in early and middle Saxon England’.<sup>119</sup>

A notable feature of these and other settlements like them is that signs of permanent enclosure are not much in evidence before c. 600.<sup>120</sup> There is no clear sense that these rural settlements were particularly fixed in the landscape by immovable boundaries, and it may be that the social organization reflected in their layout was not yet as dependent on fixed loci as it became from c. 600 onwards.<sup>121</sup> Dominic Powlesland has identified three features that characterise early medieval settlements, these being, *Grubenhäuser*, ‘rectangular post-hole structures’, and ‘cooking or fire pits’.<sup>122</sup> The first of these, *Grubenhäuser*, are one feature of early settlements which has

114 Beare, ‘Tacitus on the Germans’, p. 66.

115 Hamerow, ‘Shaping Settlements’, p. 15.

116 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, pp. 93–94. Hamerow’s study classifies these settlements under several different types, including row settlements, grouped settlements, polyfocal settlements, perpendicular settlements, and single farmsteads (p. 54); see also Hamerow, ‘Overview: Rural Settlement’, p. 121; Ulmschneider, ‘Settlement Hierarchy’, p. 159.

117 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 94; Addyman, ‘The Anglo-Saxon House’, pp. 277–78.

118 West and others, *West Stow: The Anglo-Saxon Village*, pp. 111–12.

119 Hamerow, *Excavations at Mucking, II*, p. 314.

120 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 97.

121 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 12.

122 Powlesland, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Settlements’, pp. 104, 107–08.



Figure 2.5. Site plan of Mucking showing the movement of the settlement across the landscape. From Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 68. With kind permission of Helena Hamerow.



often been identified as a wholesale continental import.<sup>123</sup> Hamerow, again, offers a cogent summary of the form that these buildings took and their appearance in the archaeological record:

All that normally remains of these structures is an oval or rectangular hollow of variable dimensions with (usually) two gable posts, or four corner posts or six (gable plus corner) posts. Only rarely does evidence for an entrance survive; yet wear on the sunken floor of some huts, as well as the appearance of hearths, slots, stakes, and pits in the bottom of the hollow, suggest that this often, if not always, functioned as the floor surface; the sunken floor could in some cases be laid with planks, or provided with a clay or stone surface, but was more usually earthen.<sup>124</sup>

In the most comprehensive study of *Grubenhäuser* to date, Jess Tipper notes that these buildings typically accompanied the sort of larger post-built structures referred to as 'halls' at Mucking (where 50 halls and 200 *Grubenhäuser* were excavated), which increasingly came to dominate settlements in the middle and late-Saxon periods.<sup>125</sup>

Studies of the typology of these post-built structures have made a significant contribution to the question of how settlers interacted and integrated with the sub-Roman population, an important issue given that the continental 'Germanic' longhouse has yet to be identified in Britain, despite its endurance on the Continent. This has led to the suggestion that post-built structures, the first 'hall' buildings in Britain, may represent an interaction between Romano-British traditions and those introduced from the Continent.<sup>126</sup> Discussing the interaction between these building practices, Blair notes that discussion has mainly been focused on 'the highest rather than the lowest social level', and may well have eclipsed the influence and presence of Insular forms predating the early-Saxon period such as the round house, which may have survived in the 'invisible sector of domestic building culture'.<sup>127</sup> We might then interpret these early settlements, with their central hall buildings and ancillary *Grubenhäuser* (whether domestic or industrial in function), together with a general lack of enclosures, as reflective of the social structures of the people who occupied them. Whilst these were by no means the same people that Tacitus had written about several hundred years before, their settlements did share some of the same characteristics, in so far as their buildings were mostly constructed out of timber and appeared to Roman eyes to have been laid out in a somewhat dispersed

123 These are also commonly referred to as Sunken Featured Buildings (SFBs). Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, p. 30; Welch, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 34.

124 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 31.

125 Dixon, 'The Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Mucking', p. 126; Tipper, *The Grubenhäuser in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 10–13; Rahtz, 'Buildings and Rural Settlements', p. 73.

126 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 46; Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early-Saxon Kingdoms*, p. 30; Dixon, 'Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Mucking', p. 132; Marshall and Marshall, 'Differentiation, Change and Continuity', p. 395; Marshall and Marshall, 'A Survey and Analysis', p. 29. Martin Welch advised caution on this point due to the excavation of 'too few ordinary Romano-British rural settlements to be able to claim as yet that we can define their characteristics'; see Welch, 'Rural Settlement Patterns', p. 16.

127 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 37.



Figure 2.6. Reconstruction of a Sunken Featured Building at West Stow floored at the base of the pit. Photograph: Author.



Figure 2.7. Reconstruction of a post-built structure at West Stow. Photograph: Author.

fashion. This did not mean, however, that these places were disorganized, but rather differently-organized, after a fashion that has appeared equally strange and alien to both the urban inhabitants of ancient Rome, and to modern inheritors of Classical urban culture. Although this is not in itself a criticism of modern commentators, it draws attention to the gap between our modern understanding of how settlements should be structured, and should operate, and the early medieval reality revealed in the soil. In much the same way that care should be taken when approaching medieval conceptions of belief, aesthetics, and so on, it is important to be conscious of this fact, and in describing these settlements to be aware that what seems disordered to our eyes may have seemed in no way disorderly to their inhabitants.

## ***Loci Amoeni* in the Vernacular Tradition**

Representations of settlements like these are thin on the ground in Old English literature, if they are there at all. Whilst halls, fortifications, and the like are fairly prominent, lower-status buildings appear only very occasionally, and then only in roles subordinate to these more striking and ideologically-charged constructions. These relationships will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter, but for now it is important to note the significant features of rural settlements considered thus far, and the relationship they may have with the representation of idealised landscapes in Old English literature, specifically that of the *locus amoenus*. The *locus amoenus* (pleasant place), as Catherine Clarke notes, has only begun to emerge as a focus of critical interest within the last two decades or so, at least as far as Old English literature is concerned.<sup>128</sup> Clarke has shown that this was ‘a key image in the invention and promotion of English national and cultural identity’, and is part and parcel of the description of Britain with which Bede opens the *Historia*, providing a ‘potent image of the idealised, Edenic island’ that may have influenced the work of numerous early English writers.<sup>129</sup>

Bede’s own poetry reflects this interest in *De die iudicii*. The opening lines of this poem, which establish the setting in which the speaker experiences a vision of the apocalypse, were subject to significant development by the Old English poet who translated it into *Judgement Day II*, presenting a secluded place in the landscape for retreat and reflection.<sup>130</sup> He writes that:

Hwæt. Ic ana sæt innan bearwe,  
mid helme beþeht, holte tomiddes,  
þær þa wæterburnan swedgon and urnon  
on middan gehæge, eal swa ic secge.  
Eac þær wynwyrta weoxon and bleowon

<sup>128</sup> Clarke, ‘Envelope Pattern’.

<sup>129</sup> Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England*, pp. 7, 66.

<sup>130</sup> See further discussion in Bintley, ‘Landscape Gardening’, and Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*. Whitbread noted that the rest of the Old English poem is generally faithful to the Latin text; see Whitbread, ‘A Study of Bede’s *Versus de Die Iudicii*’, pp. 193–94; also Whitbread, ‘The Old English Poem *Judgment Day II*’.

innon þam gemonge on ænlicum wonge,  
 and þa wudubeamas wagedon and swegdon  
 þurh winda gryre; wolcn wæs gehrered,  
 and min earme mod eal wæs gedrefed.<sup>131</sup>

[Lo! I sat alone within a grove, covered by the canopy, in the midst of a forest, where waters rushed and flowed, enclosed by a hedge, just as I say. Also delightful plants flowered and bloomed there within that throng, on that incomparable plain, and the forest trees shook and resounded through the wind's terrible power; the clouds were stirred, and my sorrowful spirit was entirely troubled.]

The beauty and seclusion of this place, which permits the journey of the soul and the poetic voice into realms beyond, is of course an idealised representation of a natural landscape, though not an unrealistic one. As we have already seen, Old English poets show a conscious awareness that theirs was by no means a 'primeval land' of pristine beauty, but rather a palimpsest of earlier peoples and cultures.<sup>132</sup> This is a landscape that reveals conscious management by human hands.

Despite this, as Alvin Lee has noted, one of the 'basic structure of metaphorical images' of the world found in Old English poetry is that of 'the paradisaal dwelling-place on earth, in a light-filled green plain'.<sup>133</sup> One of the finest examples of this appears in the Exeter Book poem *The Phoenix*, immediately following the Guthlac poems in which the reader would have encountered the transformation of fenland plagued by demons into a place of beauty.<sup>134</sup> In this poem the rebirth of the Phoenix from its own ashes is presented as an allegory for the death and resurrection of Christ. In several places the poet departs from the likely source (the *Carmen de ave phoenice* of Lactantius), often in order to develop the landscape that the bird inhabits, in what may be an effort to appeal to the tastes of vernacular readers.<sup>135</sup> One of the most florid descriptions of the plain inhabited by the Phoenix appears early in the poem:<sup>136</sup>

Smylre is se sigewong; sunbearn lixed,  
 wuduholc wynlic. Wæstmas ne dreosað,

<sup>131</sup> Text from *The Old English Poem 'Judgement Day II'*, ed. by Caie, p. 84. Caie dates the translation to the late tenth century (pp. x, 10).

<sup>132</sup> Howe, 'The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England', p. 91; also Howe, 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Postcolonial Void', p. 36; Rackham, 'Trees and Woodland in Anglo-Saxon England', p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall and Earth-Dragon*, p. 114; Howe, 'The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England', p. 92.

<sup>134</sup> Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England*, pp. 40–42; Clarke, 'Envelope Pattern'.

<sup>135</sup> Calder, 'The Vision of Paradise', p. 167; Falvo-Heffernan, 'The Old English *Phoenix*', p. 239. Gorst argues for the consideration of a broader range of sources, demonstrating the complex relationship between Latin poems featuring Eden and the phoenix; see Gorst, 'Latin Sources of the Old English *Phoenix*', p. 141. For a MnE text of Lactantius' *De Ave Phoenice* see *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, trans. by Allen and Calder, pp. 113–20. Allen and Calder's edition also considers the influence of phoenix legends from Ambrose's commentary in the *Hexameron*, and the description from the *Physiologus*. See also recent discussion of this landscape in Appleton, 'The Insular Landscape of the Old English *Phoenix*'.

<sup>136</sup> As are Falvo-Heffernan's reasons for describing the first 380 lines of *The Phoenix* as a 'paraphrase' of Lactantius' text. See Falvo-Heffernan, 'The Old English *Phoenix*', p. 39. The Old English poet develops Lactantius' themes and images to a significant extent.

beorhte blede, ac þa beamas a  
 grene stondað, swa him god bibeað.  
 Wintres ond sumeres wudu bið gelice  
 bledum gehongen; næfre brosniað  
 leaf under lyfte, ne him lig sceþeð  
 æfre to ealdre, ærþon edwenden worulde geweorðe.

[That plain of victory is tranquil; the sun-bower shines, a beautiful woodland grove; the plants never wither, the bright branches, but those trees stand ever green, as God has bidden them. Through winter and summer alike that wood is draped with foliage; never shall a leaf wither under the sky, nor fire harm them ever through the ages, until the ending of the world.]

(*Phoenix* 33–41)

The emphasis of this passage on the ever-green (not evergreen) woodland trees of the ‘sigewong’ (victory-plain) and their endurance against the elements is particularly notable given the vital contribution of trees and woodland to various aspects of daily life.<sup>137</sup> In addition to serving as *the* medium for vernacular architecture, trees also played a part in both Christian and pre-Christian religion, and were used in the production and manufacture of food and drink, fuel, and tools large and small, domestic and industrial.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, whilst there are certainly many aspects of *The Phoenix* which rightly invite an allegorical reading, to depart entirely from thinking of this landscape as grounded in the physical world would be an oversight.<sup>139</sup>

On at least one level we should then be prepared to think of this paradisaical plain as the perfected form of a landscape that was part of the lived experience of early medieval readers. The creation story sung in Heorot not long after its construction depicts a similarly Edenic landscape that shares common features with the peerless plain in *The Phoenix*. Although the contexts of this song in *Beowulf* indicate that it represents a pre-Christian account of the creation, it is nevertheless strongly coloured by the *Beowulf* poet’s knowledge of Genesis.<sup>140</sup>

Sægde se þe cūþe  
 frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,  
 cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worhte  
 wlitebeorhtne wang swa wæter bebugeð,  
 gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan  
 leoman to leohte landbuendum,

137 This description is at the very least reminiscent of the Tree of Life in Revelation 22 whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

138 The most recent and complete study of this being Hooke, *Trees and Woodland in Anglo-Saxon England*, esp. pp. 113–282; also Bintley, ‘Trees and Woodland in Anglo-Saxon Culture’, pp. 151–211, and Bintley and Shapland, eds, *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*.

139 Calder, ‘The Vision of Paradise’, pp. 167, 171.

140 We know that the Danes are heathens here because the poet writes that *ne wiston hie drihten god* (‘they did not know the Lord God’ 181), and made offerings at *hærgtrafum* (‘heathen shrines’ 175) after Grendel’s visits to Heorot.

ond gefræt Wade foldan sceatas  
 leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop  
 cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.

[Said he who spoke that he would recount the ancient origins of men, and said that the almighty wrought the earth, the beautiful plain, as far as the encircling water, and set in victory the sun and moon as luminaries to light the dwellers in the land, and adorned the surfaces of the earth, with branches and leaves, shaping life also for each of those species that move about with life.]

(*Beowulf* 92–98)

As in *The Phoenix*, the earthly dwelling place in *Beowulf* is a ‘witebeorhtne wang’ (beautiful plain), encircled by waters (*Phoenix* 42–46), and ‘gefræt Wade’ (adorned) with ‘leomum ond leafum’ (branches and leaves) in much the same fashion as the plain in *The Phoenix*, ‘gehongen’ (draped) with foliage.<sup>141</sup> The construction of Heorot takes place only a few lines before, where the poet writes that the ‘sele hlifade, heah ond horngeap’ (the hall towered, high and horn-gabled, 81–82). Here, Hrothgar’s hall can be imagined at the centre of a primordial landscape; this evokes both the unspoiled Eden that preceded even the last survivor and the giants, but perhaps also the space around the halls within whose walls the poem was performed.

Worth noting, if only as a point of contrast, is the apparent dearth of trees in the creation account of *Genesis A*, a poem often regarded as a straightforward Old English versification of the Latin text, though Paul Remley has shown that it displays a number of features which make this by no means certain.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Jennifer Neville has noted that the poem only mentions foliage once we reach the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, probably due to the loss of a leaf (of the manuscript) likely to have included the portion of Genesis describing the creation of plant-life (1. 11–2. 19).<sup>143</sup> The creation of dry land for human habitation broadly follows the biblical account:

Frean engla heht  
 þurh his word we san wæter gemæne,  
 þa nu under roderum heora ryne healdað,  
 stowe gestefnde. Ða stod hraðe

<sup>141</sup> North argues that *gefræt Wade* (‘adorned’ 96) is used in the creation song in order to recall ‘inhabited vinescroll’, in North, *The Origins of Beowulf*, p. 182. *Gefræt Wade* appears infrequently in this exact form, recalling forms of decoration that are not limited to vine-scroll. More common variants include *gefræt(e)wod*, which is used again elsewhere to describe the decoration of Heorot (*Beowulf* 992), the adornment of the kingdom of heaven twice in *Christ and Satan* (307, 647), and the raiment of eponymous heroine and looted Assyrian armour in *Judith* (171, 328). Similarly, *gefrætwa(e)d* is used in *Andreas* (715) to describe the walls of the temple in Jerusalem, the armour of fallen soldiers in *The Ruin* (33), and both virtuous souls and the Phoenix itself *gefrætwað* with perfumes and feathers in *The Phoenix* (116, 239). All references to *Christ and Satan* from *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp pp. 133–58; all references to *Judith* from *Judith*, ed. by Griffith. Disenza also discusses this location as an inhabited place; see *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 96–99.

<sup>142</sup> Remley, ‘The Latin Textual Basis of *Genesis A*’, pp. 163, 172, 185.

<sup>143</sup> Neville, ‘Leaves of Grass’, p. 292.



holm under heofonum, swa se halga bebead,  
 sid ætsomne, ða gesundrod wæs  
 lago wið lande. Geseah þa lifes weard  
 drige stowe, dugoða hyrde,  
 wide æteowde, þa se wuldorcýning  
 eorðan nemde.

[The Lord of Angels commanded by his word that the waters should be joined in one, which now keep their course beneath the skies, confined in their place. Then the broad ocean beneath the heavens swiftly stood gathered together; then the sea was divided from the land. The Guardian Lord of life, the Shepherd of the angelic multitudes, observed a dry place — far and wide it appeared — which he named Earth.]

(Gen A 157–66)

In the biblical Genesis this act precedes the creation of vegetation absent from *Genesis A*. Therefore, although the foundation of this unadorned earth initially seems at odds with the *loci amoeni* encountered so far, it is likely that the poet would have continued to follow the biblical narrative, and that the lost folio would have been adorned with the same foliage as the groves of *The Phoenix*, or the plain decorated with branches and leaves and encircled by waters in *Beowulf*.

As Alvin Lee suggested, the presentation of idealized rural *loci amoeni* in *Beowulf* and *The Phoenix* might reasonably be assumed to represent a vernacular tradition of an unspoiled Edenic landscape, and perhaps even, if the tradition predated the inception of a Eden, something akin to the description of the world reborn after Ragnarøk at the end of the Old Norse *Völuspá*.<sup>144</sup> This is speculation, however, and what we have is a clear conception of an Edenic landscape: a place of eternal summers, ever-green and ever-fruitful, a place of comfort and abundance with close links to life-giving woodland and plentiful springs, and one from which human interference in the form of buildings is conspicuously absent. As with so many imagined gardens of earthly delight, it is difficult not to get carried away with descriptions like these, as they present images of beauty designed to invoke a sense of awe and wonder, just as the ruins of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* were engineered to evoke a sense of loss, longing, and the inevitable demise of all things built by human hands. These kinds of imagined landscapes, grounded in the material world yet unavoidably of the mind, present a set of polarized attitudes towards idyllic ‘natural’ landscapes and those littered with broken stones, when the reality of everyday experience was somewhere in between; settlement did continue in and around Roman sites, and rural farming settlements would have been far from idyllic for much of the year.

<sup>144</sup> This poem is thought to have been composed in Iceland c. 1000, and thus within decades of the compilation of the Exeter Book; on this dating see Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, p. 20; North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, p. 80; Dronke, ‘Beowulf and Ragnarøk’, p. 307; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Hall, p. 366.

## Conclusion

In the sixth century, when Gildas wrote his account of the abandonment of the Romano-British cities and the deaths of their inhabitants, he inadvertently created a myth of origins for the same peoples he held responsible for this violence. Bede, for whom these ‘invaders’ were a sword in the hand of God, ensured that this narrative accompanied the story of their *adventus* when he included it in his *Historia*. The translation of this text into the vernacular at around the time of Alfred, as well as Wulfstan’s appeal to its authority in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, shows the extent to which it became an established part of early English mythologies of origins. It is unsurprising, in this light, that representations of ruined Roman settlements appear so prominently in the Old English literary tradition, as part of a topos which contributes significantly to the lasting appeal of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*. Although these poems were not written at this time, they encapsulate traditions concerning the fate of the Roman towns that date to at least the time of Bede.

In the poetic imagination, devoid of life and resounding with echoes of death, these urban ruins stand in stark contrast with idealized rural environments. This is despite the fact that comparable settlements might be found in both contexts at this time, whilst walled places that did not become towns in the late-Saxon period (such as Portchester) housed high-status sites comparable to those found in other contexts (such as Goltho).<sup>145</sup> The literary juxtaposition of post-urban desolation and the charms of the rural *locus amoenus* present a binary that does not strictly represent patterns of use or occupation at any point in the period. If later poetry representing urban ruin responded to traditions that were invented and developed earlier in the period, and by the time of Bede at the very least, it is worth considering the extent to which the same may also be true of the *locus amoenus*. Given that its origins as a literary topos lie in the biblical and Classical traditions, its appearance in vernacular texts clearly reflects a process of integration that shows knowledge and appreciation of this literary heritage in an Anglicised form. But it is also worth considering the extent to which it may have built on existing vernacular traditions. Strictly speaking, we cannot know this either way; no texts explicitly evidence this hybridisation. However, if we view all aspects of this tradition as literary borrowings, we assume that there existed no earlier tradition of describing rural landscapes in positive terms. Less improbably, I would suggest that the literary environments discussed towards the end of this chapter may have been a product of interaction between the conventions of the *locus amoenus* tradition and similar ideas that may already have been present in vernacular traditions.

Literary scholars are comfortable drawing parallels between ruins in texts and the landscape, where they are undoubtedly a *presence*, but have had less to say about the comparative *absence* of buildings in idealised rural landscapes and *loci amoeni* — the one exception being the very late poem *Durham*.<sup>146</sup> Though there are

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145 See further discussion in Chapter 5.

146 See discussion, pp. 181–85.



many possible reasons for this, the lack of farms and villages in vernacular poetic descriptions of rural landscapes has encouraged little consideration of what they might reveal about conceptions of rural *settlement* landscapes. The landscapes we have encountered towards the end of this chapter are undoubtedly idealised forms, but they are not merely responses to literary topoi. They are works that reflect both literary inheritances *and* the material conditions of the world in which their authors lived, whether or not they were consciously representing their environment. Through their dis/continuities with the material character of rural settlements, these works convey some important ideas about the conditions of contemporary rural life. They emphasise: the importance and value of natural resources (woodland, plain, and water) for various purposes, not the least of them building in timber; seasonality, including the largesse of the summer season (and by implication the pressures of winter); and perhaps also the balance between different types of land to suit various purposes — a serious consideration for subsistence farmers. If anything, the character of earlier, unenclosed settlements — timbered, wandering, and lightly built — is even more revealing in contrast with the idealized images of fixity, security, and endless summer that we find in these texts. The world around us, in stark contrast, offers no such comforts. The stone rampart is a rearrangement of stones taken up from the earth, to which they will inevitably return when the mortar cracks and crumbles. The oak shingles, the thatched roof, the timber posts, and the twisted withies in the walls all began their lives as vegetation, and in time will grow brittle, rot, or burn, like the bodies of their builders and inhabitants. In this way the archaeology of these places and their textual counterparts tell us the same story; all things are in process, and all things are subject to natural decay. Both the bodies of humans and the buildings they occupy take form only temporarily. Whether framed by bone or timber, these shelters can be certain only of their allotted share of winters before returning to the earth.



## Settlements Before the ‘Viking Age’

In the previous chapter we saw how, following the end of Roman rule in Britain, town life came to an end. Although towns may have retained symbolic and administrative importance as so-called central places, they were not inhabited to anything like the same extent that they once had been, for a variety of potential reasons. Rather than building in stone, or repairing structures in these places for reoccupation, peoples who introduced new architectural styles from what are now northern Germany and southern Scandinavia constructed their buildings out of timber, in largely free-form settlements that in some cases moved gradually across the landscape with the passing of generations.

The Gregorian mission’s reintroduction of stone building began a process that would come to redefine how people thought about settlements of all kinds in the centuries that followed. This chapter begins by considering the impact of the Church on the settlement landscape from the early seventh century onwards. Just as continental architectural traditions imported in the fifth century show signs of having been influenced by Romano-British buildings, new ideas about buildings and settlements that were introduced by the Church in the seventh show similar signs of interaction with existing Insular concepts. Importantly, hall buildings remained central to conceptions of power until the end of the period, an ideological orthodoxy that required a degree of reconciliation with the spiritual centrality of ecclesiastical structures and settlements. Bede’s work, once again, appears to have been an important influence in determining understanding of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical settlements, and a parallel exploration of his exegetical and historical writings offers insight into the exercise of different forms of power in middle-Saxon England.

The chapter goes on to explore some of the ways in which literary texts reflect connections between early medieval people and the buildings and settlements in which they lived. The representation of these relationships is especially rich, in some instances, because of their authors’ familiarity with contemporary construction methods and materials. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible reasons why the sorts of *wīc* and burh sites that developed in the mid-Saxon period are comparatively underrepresented in Old English literature, despite having been a prominent presence in the landscape with far-reaching significance.

### Rebuilding Christendom in the Ruins of Rome

In his *Historia*, Bede represents the Roman Church as being explicitly interested in the reoccupation of urban sites. Indeed, it is likely that the re-establishment of ecclesiastical centres in places that had been Christian foundations under Roman rule was a direct



Figure 3.1. Map of churches associated with Roman buildings in Britain. From Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 76. With kind permission of Tyler Bell.

consequence of Pope Gregory's aim to regain spiritual control over a 'lost province'; where the secular Roman defence and maintenance of these foundations had failed, the reconstruction of Roman Christendom would triumph. This view is supported by the archaeological record, which confirms the large number of early churches in Britain (over 160) that were associated with Roman buildings.<sup>1</sup> Tyler Bell writes that the placing of 'primary bishoprics at London and York, with twelve sees', seems to have been a decision made with the 'political and geographical layout of the former province' in mind, and as this was perhaps not best suited to the organization of contemporary power structures,

<sup>1</sup> Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings', p. 1.

it seems likely that Gregory was doing the best he could with the information available to him, thinking of Britain as Roman Britannia, rather than as the patchwork of polities that had emerged *after* Rome.<sup>2</sup> As this process of reclamation and redevelopment continued well into the seventh and perhaps eighth centuries, it seems likely that the same approach to former Roman buildings and settlements was considered equally valid by representatives of the Roman Church on the front lines in the generations that followed.<sup>3</sup> Bell suggests that in an architectural sense, at least, the Roman might be considered synonymous with the Christian from the seventh century onwards.<sup>4</sup>

In the textual tradition this process begins in Canterbury, one of the towns thought by some to have experienced a degree of continuity between the sub-Roman and early-Saxon periods, although evidence for the occupation of the intramural space remains limited.<sup>5</sup> Canterbury must already have been a royal centre for the rulers of Kent in some sense when King Æthelberht invited St Augustine and his retinue there from their landing-place on the Isle of Thanet, and gave them space to occupy within the walls of the town.<sup>6</sup> The procession of Augustine and his missionaries into the intramural space emphasizes the symbolic importance that it held in the minds of Bede and, if this report is accurate, Augustine himself:

Dedit ergo eis mansionem in ciuitate Doruuernensi, quae imperii sui totius erat metropolis, eisque, ut promiserat, cum administratione uictus temporalis licentiam quoque praedicandi non abstulit. Fertur autem, quia adpropinquantes ciuitati, more suo cum cruce sancta et imagine magni regis Domini nostri Iesu Christi hanc laetaniam consona uoce modularentur: 'Deprecamur te, Domine, in omni misericordia tua, ut auferatur furor tuus et ira tua a ciuitate ista, et de domo sancta tua, quoniam peccauimus. Alleluia.

[So he gave them a dwelling in the city of Canterbury, which was the chief city of all his dominions; and, in accordance with his promise, he granted them provisions and did not refuse them freedom to preach. It is related that as they approached the city in accordance with their custom carrying the holy cross and the image of our great King and Lord, Jesus Christ, they sang this litany in unison: 'We beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy great mercy, that Thy wrath and anger may be turned away from this city and from Thy holy house, for we have sinned, Alleluia.']<sup>7</sup>

2 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 27; Rodwell, 'Churches in the Landscape', 1–3; Barrow, 'Churches, Education and Literacy in Towns', p. 128. Ian Wood argues that this desire on Gregory's part probably says as much about the 'imperial background' of his plan as it does the 'lack of realism' behind some of his expectations; see Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', p. 16; also Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 10.

3 As argued in Gibbs, 'The Decrees of Agatho and the Gregorian Plan for York', p. 219.

4 Bell, 'Churches on Roman Buildings', pp. 6–7.

5 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, pp. 103–06; Tatton-Brown, 'The Towns of Kent', p. 5; Vince, 'Saxon Urban Economies', p. 109.

6 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, pp. 12–13. As Tim Tatton-Brown notes, Canterbury was also the site of one of the first mints in England, perhaps from as early as c. 630; see Tatton-Brown, 'The Towns of Kent', p. 1.

7 *HE* 1. 25 (pp. 74–77).

This both echoes the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and serves symbolically to purge the area within Canterbury's walls of those sins which had led to the destruction of the towns earlier in the *Historia*. The 'Hallelujah' which ends the litany described, notably, is also reminiscent of both the 'Hallelujah' victory earlier in the *Historia*, through which the British overcame Saxon and Pictish armies, and the Scriptural precedent to which this episode itself alludes — the conquest of the city of Jericho under the leadership of Joshua.<sup>8</sup> Although the worship of this community began in the supposedly pre-existing Roman church of St Martin's (which is in any case likely to have been sited on a Roman structure), Bede writes that it was not long before they were granted a permanent place within the walls.<sup>9</sup> In the *Historia* the establishment of this cathedral is followed by the founding of further Episcopal seats at Rochester and London, then under the apparent authority of Æthelberht as *bretwalda*, whatever this may have meant.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of Rochester's Roman past may probably an important factor in its regeneration, though even by the time of the Conquest it was only the fifth or sixth most populous town in Kent, having suffered at the hands of the Mercians in 676, and under the vikings in the ninth century.<sup>11</sup> The foundation of the corresponding seat in London is frustratingly obscure in the archaeological record, with the construction of a succession of cathedrals in the early and later medieval periods (many of which burned down) eventually followed by the establishment of Wren's cathedral, the foundations of which are likely to have destroyed any remaining evidence of early medieval buildings.<sup>12</sup> The first cathedral at London was almost certainly intramural. The Augustinian mission, under the leadership of a Roman, is unlikely to have recognized any settlement without walls as the 'city' of London. This by no means negates the likelihood that a church (or churches) were also established at around the same time to minister to the citizens of the fledgling trading settlement further up the Thames. Aside from Canterbury and London, the other most important site to see the establishment of an ecclesiastical site of corresponding importance was the former Roman *colonia* of *Eboracum*, Anglian *Eofofowic*. Here, excavations suggest that the first church is

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- 8 *HE* 1. 20 (pp. 62–65). Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', p. 11; Higham, 'Constantius, St Germanus and Fifth-Century Britain', pp. 128–29. See Joshua 6. 16–19 (for full account see verses 1–27).
  - 9 *HE* 1. 26 (pp. 76–79). Brooks, 'The Ecclesiastical Topography of Early Medieval Canterbury', pp. 492–93; Gem, *English Heritage Book of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury*, pp. 20, 95; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 61–62, 65–73; more recently, see Gem, 'The Rebuilding of Canterbury Cathedral by Archbishop Wulfred (805–32)'.
  - 10 Steven Fanning has argued that this term was probably less significant than once thought; see discussion in Fanning, 'Bede, *Imperium*, and the Bretwaldas', p. 24; Blair 'Small Towns 600–1270', p. 247; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 188–89; Loseby, 'Power and Towns', p. 535.
  - 11 Brooks, 'Rochester, A. D. 400–1066', p. 6; Smith, 'The Early Community of St Andrew at Rochester', pp. 290, 298; McAleer, *Rochester Cathedral 604–1540*, pp. 8–9, 16–17; Tatton-Brown, 'The Towns of Kent', pp. 3, 14.
  - 12 See discussion in Cowie, 'Mercian London', pp. 196–97; Vince, *Saxon London*, pp. 10, 62; Bateman and others, *London's Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 95.

likely to have been built in the area of the Roman *principia*, close to the site of the present medieval Minster.<sup>13</sup>

One of the aims of those who established these ecclesiastical foundations was the reclamation and sanctification of intramural space, so that a rejuvenated Roman Christendom might recover the spiritual wasteland within the walls.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, new ecclesiastical foundations made similar use of Roman structures that had previously been used as burial sites in the pre-Christian period. Whilst, as Bell notes, the 'available body of evidence allows few firm conclusions' to be made about the motives of those who interred their dead in these places, it is difficult not to draw connections between this aspect of the archaeological record and the wider associations with stone ruins, death, and desolation discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>15</sup> Although burials of this kind are generally lacking in grave goods, and phasing therefore remains problematic, radiocarbon evidence indicates dates clustering around the 'late sixth and seventh centuries'.<sup>16</sup> This may suggest that inhumation in these places was more characteristic of fifth and sixth century society than it was to become following the efforts of Augustine and his successors. In a fashion seemingly distinct from the reuse of barrow sites, burials of this kind seem to demonstrate an awareness of Roman structures 'as architecture', rather than simply as stones, a characteristic which is evident from the alignment of burials with reference to walls and doorways, as seen at the villa at Norton Disney (Lincolnshire) and the great palace at Fishbourne (Sussex).<sup>17</sup>

Despite this, burials do not seem to have been made with any particular recognition of the earlier or original function of these buildings, save for a predominance of reused temples in the south-west, where twenty-two burial sites (26%) were also 'on or adjacent to a hypocausted structure or bathhouse'.<sup>18</sup> There is probably a reasonable distinction to be made between these kinds of burials and those which reused purpose-built Roman mausolea, of which there are comparatively few, and the majority of which are associated with churches.<sup>19</sup> Bell writes that Roman mausolea with 'overlying churches probably form some of the earliest examples of reuse in Britain'.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the best candidate for this sort of 'Augustinian rebuild', is

13 Norton, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cathedral at York', pp. 12–15; Blair, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', p. 44; Hall, *English Heritage Book of Viking Age York*, p. 31; Ottaway, *The Archaeology of York*, vol. 3, p. 295; Rodwell, 'Churches in the Landscape', p. 4; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 153; Rollason, 'Historical Evidence for Anglian York', pp. 122–24; and Tweddle, 'The Anglian City', pp. 157, 180–81.

14 Rodwell, 'Churches in the Landscape', p. 3. Quite how large these would have been in the beginning, as Peter Addyman noted, is unknown and probably unknowable. See Addyman, 'York and Canterbury as Ecclesiastical Centres', p. 502.

15 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 67.

16 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 38.

17 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, pp. 39–43, 52. A gazetteer of 'Burials Associated with Roman Structures' excavated (to 2005) can be found in the same volume (pp. 156–89).

18 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, pp. 61, 68.

19 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 57.

20 For a full discussion of churches constructed overlying Roman mausolea see Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, pp. 78–83.

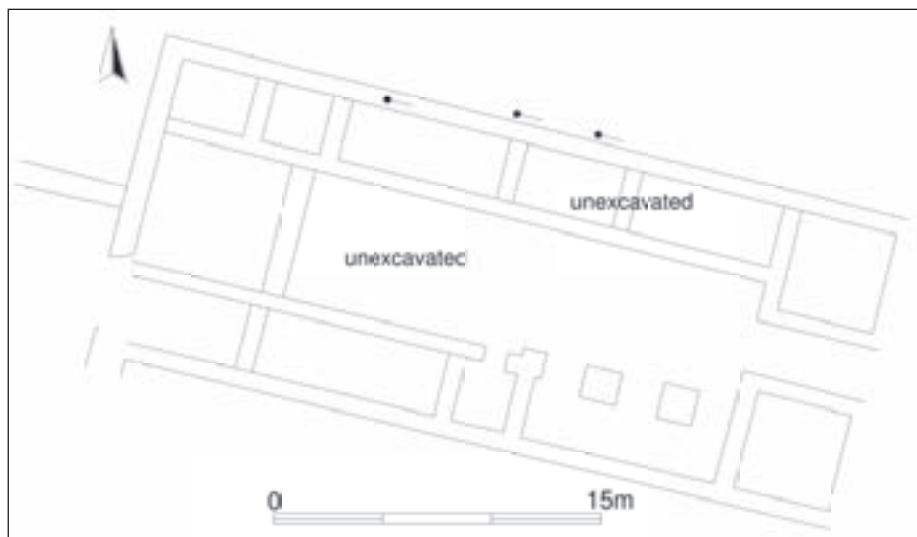


Figure 3.2. Plan of burials at the Roman villa at Norton Disney. From Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 42. With kind permission of Tyler Bell.

the chapel at Stone-by-Faversham, ‘unequivocally an early rebuild’, some 16km from Canterbury.<sup>21</sup> This site is particularly significant because it displays evidence of burials in the sub-Roman period, before the proposed construction of the early medieval church, although it is possible that these remains may also have been sub-Roman.<sup>22</sup> If these burials are sub-Roman, this building may have fallen out of use in the late Roman period, being reused in the centuries that followed as a place of burial, before it was reappropriated by Christian builders engaged in the process of appropriating Roman buildings for Christendom.

Ecclesiastical reuse of stone formerly associated with Roman structures and monuments is also evident from accounts such as the life of St Æthelthryth, the seventh-century abbess of Ely. The earliest surviving details of Æthelthryth’s life are included in Bede’s *Historia*, which served as the basis for the life composed by Ælfric, albeit with some significant additions which suggest that the latter was also making use of other traditions surrounding her life, death, burial, and reburial. After the death of Æthelthryth (c. 679), she was initially buried in an undistinguished plot alongside the other nuns. Sixteen years later her sister and successor Sexburh

21 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 125. Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, II, pp. 575–77. Other examples of churches in Kent associated with Roman sites still prominent in the landscape include the early church at Reculver (St Mary, founded c. 669, pp. 502–09) and the late-Saxon church attached to the Roman lighthouse at Dover castle (St Mary, pp. 214–17).

22 Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 125; see also Taylor and Yonge, ‘The Ruined Church at Stone-by-Faversham’; Fletcher, ‘The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham’; Fletcher and Meates, ‘The Ruined Church of Stone-by-Faversham, Second Report’.



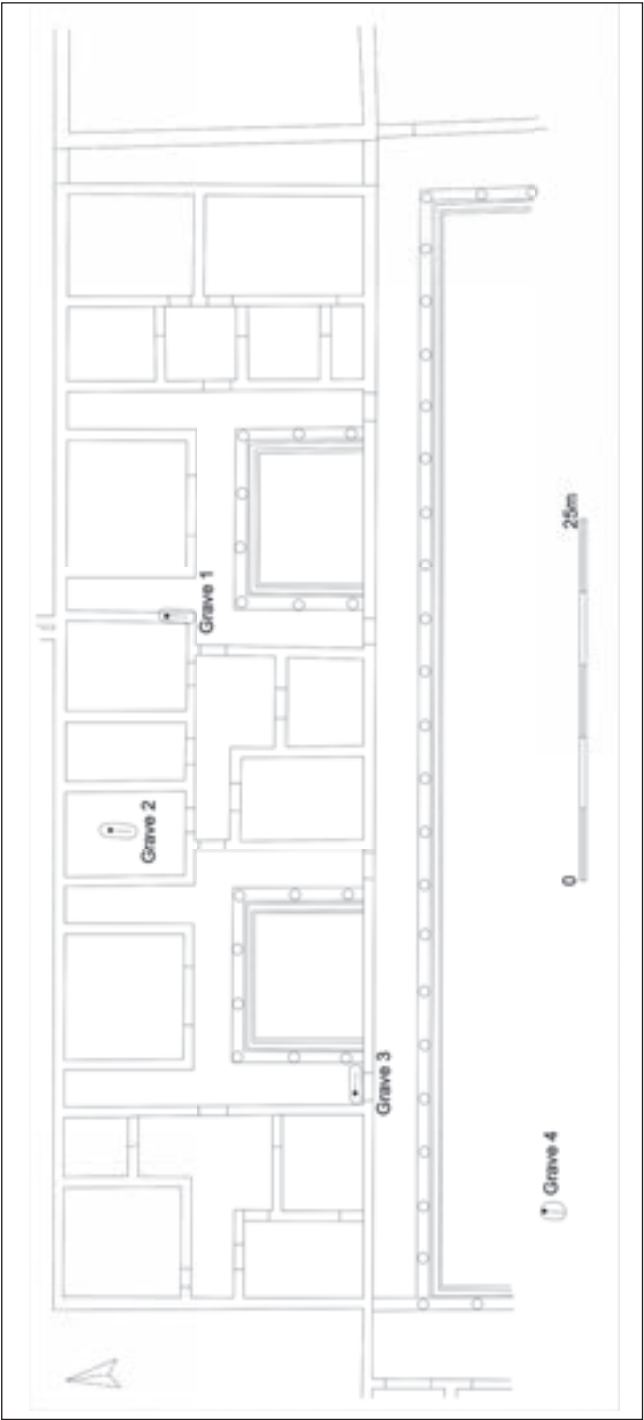


Figure 3.3. Plan of burials at the Roman palace at Fishbourne. From Bell, *The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures*, p. 41. With kind permission of Tyler Bell.



Figure 3.4. Romano-British shrine and medieval chapel at Stone-by-Faversham, Kent. Photograph: Author.

sent monks out to seek suitable stone from which to carve a coffin, as there were ‘feawa weorcstana’ (few hewn stones) to be found and used as raw material in the immediate fenland of Ely.<sup>23</sup> Ælfric records that these brothers rowed to Grantchester, where they encountered a:

...mære þruh wið þone weall standende, geworht of marmstane eall hwites  
bleos bufan þære eorðan, and þæt hlyd ðærto gelimplice gefeged, eac of hwitum  
marmstane, swa swa hit macode God.

[...glorious sarcophagus standing against the wall, made of marble and all  
white in colour above the earth, with a lid attached that fitted it suitably, also  
of white marble, just as God had crafted it.]

The monks were suitably delighted to find the coffin a perfect fit for Æthelthryth’s remains, which were subsequently exhumed and reburied with all due ceremony. There is no mention of any former occupant. Even if this episode did not actually take place, what it demonstrates both in the time of Bede in the eighth century, and Ælfric in the early eleventh, is an ongoing recognition of the process of reclaiming

23 Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. by Skeat, pp. 243–41. This account is found in its earliest surviving form in Bede’s *HE* iv. 19 (pp. 390–97).

the material of the Roman past to suit a variety of purposes. Æthelthryth's humility does not permit her to commission a stone monument on her own behalf; she is exalted, *post mortem*, by this divine provision.

## Cosmic Halls in *Beowulf* and *Cædmon's Hymn*

In symbolic terms, the most important buildings constructed in secular settlements at this time were hall buildings. Though central hall buildings had been a feature of earlier lower-status sites (such as West Stow) since the fifth century, in the seventh the 'great hall complex' emerged as a 'distinctive mode of aristocratic display', alongside the phenomenon of 'princely' barrow burials.<sup>24</sup> These great hall complexes become more obscure in the archaeological record in the eighth and ninth century, however, and as John Blair has noted, between the seventh century and c. 900, 'distinctively elite residences are virtually unknown to archaeology'.<sup>25</sup> Blair argues that the angle-sided hall 'seems to assume prestige in England soon after 900. Then, around 1000, the reintroduction of the aisled hall may have been stimulated by both ecclesiastical and vernacular developments in the Rhineland', examples of the former being found at Cheddar, Springfield Lyons, and Goltho, and of the latter at West Cotton, Faccombe Netherton, and (later) at Goltho.<sup>26</sup>

A site which continues to dominate our understanding of great hall complexes, despite its idiosyncrasies, is Yeavinger, Bede's *Ad Gefrin*, where a series of vast timber structures covering an area of some 140–60 m<sup>2</sup> were erected to meet the needs of generations of itinerant Northumbrian kings.<sup>27</sup> Planned layouts and hall buildings which closely parallel arrangements at Yeavinger are also in evidence at Cowdery's Down and Chalton (Hants), indicating that certain characteristics of these settlement types were widespread rather than limited to Anglian Northumbria.<sup>28</sup> The site excavated at Lyminge (Kent) in recent years by Gabor Thomas has revealed a similarly high-status settlement featuring prominent hall buildings, which may be paralleled by other royal halls at Dover and Eynsford.<sup>29</sup> As Carolyn Ware has noted, the positioning of the hall at Yeavinger is 'one of the most salient aspects of the site'; the hall itself functions not only as a symbolic ideal but also as a clearly defined space which served to 'establish or perhaps enhance the physical relationship

<sup>24</sup> Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Blair, 'The Making of the English House', p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> Blair, 'The Making of the English House', pp. 199–200; also see wider discussion in Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 114–31.

<sup>27</sup> Estimate from Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger*, fig. 12; Frodsham, 'Forgetting *Gefrin*', p. 192; *HE* II. 14 (pp. 186–89).

<sup>28</sup> Addyman and others, 'Anglo-Saxon Houses at Chalton, Hampshire', pp. 22–23; Addyman, 'The Anglo-Saxon House', p. 285; James and others, 'An Early Medieval Building Tradition', p. 184; Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down', p. 247; Marshall and Marshall, 'Differentiation, Change and Continuity', p. 398; Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> See discussion in Thomas, 'Monasteries and Places of Power'; also Thomas, 'Mead-Halls of the Oiscingas' (forthcoming).

between people and place.<sup>30</sup> The built environment thus serves both to reinforce and to reflect the society which constructed it, and the way in which that society itself is structured and maintained.<sup>31</sup> Hamerow, writing more generally about the social use of space in early medieval northern Europe, has similarly noted how spatial ordering in settlements and buildings thus provides both a literal and a metaphorical 'framework for living'.<sup>32</sup>

Ever since hall buildings on this scale were first excavated (i.e. from the mid-twentieth century onwards), it has been recognized that the archaeological evidence for royal halls supports their representation in Old English literature, and vice versa.<sup>33</sup> The most prominent and commonly discussed of these, Heorot, offers a fine example of the symbolic role that halls played in elite culture throughout the period. Looking back into an imagined ancestral past, the *Beowulf* poet was not terribly concerned with anachronism, and all those who experienced the poem at any point between the eighth and eleventh centuries would have been familiar with the function of hall buildings in society, even if 'great halls' are not represented in eighth- and ninth-century archaeology. It does not seem likely that those reading the poem in its manuscript contexts, around the turn of the first millennium, found the representation of Heorot in *Beowulf* unfamiliar. Rereading the poem in this way, considering how its various environments may have been understood at different times, is an underexplored area of Old English studies. As Katherine Weikert has recently suggested, the withdrawal of Wealhtheow and Hrothgar from the hall may have had markedly different significance for middle-Saxon audiences than it did for those who encountered it in the early eleventh century.<sup>34</sup> Halls remain a prominent central image in late-Saxon works like *The Battle of Maldon*, in which Byrhtnoth's warriors refer to vows sworn over mead in the hall, and as such it is reasonable to claim that the large halls constructed at late-Saxon sites like Cheddar and Goltho perpetuated many of the same cultural orthodoxies visible in *Beowulf*.<sup>35</sup> Although, as Blair has argued, great hall complexes on a grand scale may therefore have been relatively short-lived as an architectural phenomenon, it would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater to suggest that the symbolic significance of the hall was in any way diminished by buildings that were also clearly regarded as halls on a smaller scale.<sup>36</sup> As Yi-Fu Tuan observes, the symbolism of the cosmos can be encapsulated in ancient structures as vast as Rome's Pantheon, or as compact as a Mongolian yurt.<sup>37</sup>

30 Ware, 'The Social Use of Space at *Gefrin*', p. 154; see also discussion in Walker, 'In the Hall'.

31 Ware, 'The Social Use of Space at *Gefrin*', p. 156.

32 Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements*, p. 52; see also Hamerow, "'Special Deposits'", pp. 29–30.

33 Rahtz, 'Buildings and Rural Settlement', p. 65.

34 Weikert, *Authority, Gender and Space in Anglo-Norman England*.

35 Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar*, pp. 57–60, 377; Beresford, Goltho, pp. 61–84, 121–22.

36 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 138.

37 Tuan, *Space and Place*, pp. 110–12.

In the first part of *Beowulf*, as John Halverson wrote, Heorot is the centre of the poem's universe, with almost all movement being made to or from it.<sup>38</sup> The hall is of great importance in *Beowulf*, as in all Old English literature, because it is a 'meðelstede' (formal place), where those good practices are conducted which bind a society together, and thus as much an archetypal construct as it is a physical structure: a fixed point in popular consciousness where the exchange of wealth and the swearing of oaths, mediated by a myriad of other customs, served to unify the hierarchical temporal world of humans through the binding of retainers to their lords. This must be one of the reasons why, when Grendel and Beowulf are engaged in mortal combat, crashing around the hall and tearing up mead benches, the poet's focus shifts away from the hero and the monster to focus on the form, construction, and decoration of the building:

Reced hlynsode.

Pa wæs wundor micel þæt se winsele  
 wiðhæfde heapodeorum, þæt he on hrusan ne feol,  
 fæger foldbold; ac he þæs fæste wæs  
 innan ond utan irenbendum  
 searþoncum besmiþod. Ðær fram sylle abeag  
 medubenc monig, mine gefræge,  
 golde geregnad, þær þa graman wunnon,  
 þæs ne wendon ær witan Scyldinga  
 þæt hit a mid gemete manna ænig  
 betlic ond banfag tobrecan meahste,  
 listum tolucan nympe liges fæþm  
 swulge on swaþule.

[The hall resounded. It was a great wonder that that wine-hall withstood those two brave in battle, that the beautiful building did not fall to the earth; but it had been secured within and without with iron bonds skillfully wrought by the smith. I heard that there from the floor were overturned many mead-benches adorned with gold where those enemies fought. No wise man of the Scyldings had ever previously thought that any man by any means might break it, destroy it with skills, splendid and bone-adorned, unless fire's embrace should swallow it in an inferno.]

(*Beowulf* 770–77)

Rather than keeping our eyes on the battle, the poet shows us the walls of Heorot, expertly bound together by the skilful ironwork of the smith — a reflection that evokes both the iron swords that protect the hall, and perhaps also the twisted precious metals that in turn bind warriors to their lords, through gift-giving, the ritual swearing of oaths, and the distribution of mead within this space. Likewise, the tearing of mead benches from the floor in the lines immediately preceding reminds us of the

38 Halverson, 'The World of *Beowulf*', p. 593; see also Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, p. 137.

overturning of mead benches by Scyld Scefing at the beginning of the poem, and the wealth that was essential to Hrothgar's ascendancy. Finally, the reference to the bone decoration of the hall suggests the relics of hunting, and perhaps carved decorations, but also reminds us of Grendel's deeds in Heorot, and indeed the establishment of the hall on foundations of violence and warfare.

Very little is said, however, about the settlement often presumed to surround Heorot. Aside from a few offhand references to the refuge sought by men 'elles hwær' (elsewhere, 138) in 'buras' (bowers, 140) after Grendel's attack, there are no clues as to the extent of any township, nor as to whether or not Heorot is built on an island.<sup>39</sup> With the exception of Grendel's mere and the shore upon which the Geats land their ship, the world of the Danes does not appear.<sup>40</sup> In this sense Heorot is not only the centre of the poem's action — Heorot *is* Denmark, the heart and life-house of the Danes.<sup>41</sup> But it is more than this. Numerous critics have also noted the ways in which Heorot also functions as an image of the world itself, golden, bright, and brilliant in its moment, yet ultimately doomed to suffer an incendiary destruction:<sup>42</sup>

Sele hlifade  
heah ond horngeap; heaðowylma bad,  
laðan liges — ne wæs hit lenge þa gen  
þæt se ecghete aþumsweoran  
æfter wælniðe wæcnan scolde.

[The hall towered high and horn-gabled, it awaited the upheavals of war and malicious fire, but it was not yet that time when violence was to break out between men bound by their sworn oaths, following a murderous attack.]

(*Beowulf* 81–85)

Equally, the construction of Heorot by Hrothgar has frequently been compared with the cosmogonic act in Genesis, both because it immediately precedes the song of creation, and because of the emphasis on the king's words as the driving force behind its creation, springing into life at the regnal *fiat* of 'se þe his wordes geweald wide hæfde' (he who though his words ruled widely, 79).<sup>43</sup>

Parallels have been drawn between the *scop*'s account of the creation in *Beowulf* and the version in *Cædmon's Hymn* (in Bede's *Historia*), but there have been few detailed comparisons of the way in which these two poems reflect the organization and ordering

39 Herben, 'Heorot', p. 934; see also discussion in Riedinger, '“Home” in Old English Poetry', p. 51.

40 See discussion in Bammesberger, 'Beowulf's Landing in Denmark'.

41 Herben, 'Heorot', p. 934. Equally, the importance of the *Beowulf* poet's deliberate use of specific landscape terminology is considered in Gelling, 'The Landscape of *Beowulf*'; also Butts, 'The Analogical Mere'.

42 Eliason, 'The Burning of Heorot', p. 83.

43 Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 62; Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, p. 137; Halverson, 'The World of *Beowulf*', p. 596; Hume, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', p. 74.

of the cosmos, both celestial *and* terrestrial.<sup>44</sup> Daniel O'Donnell notes that although they have an obvious shared theme, and 'share some common language and ideas', there are significant structural differences between the two, which suggest a 'lack of common formulae', and the 'use of different phrases to express common ideas', indicating that neither seems to have directly influenced the other.<sup>45</sup> This is not the place for a sustained discussion of whether Cædmon ever existed, spontaneously developed the ability to compose poetry, wrote all of the poems in the Junius Manuscript, or was divinely inspired to do so. All we have is what Bede tells us.<sup>46</sup> Whilst it seems plausible that a Cædmon of some kind did exist, gained gifts in poetry in a way that appeared miraculous to his contemporaries, and to whom *Cædmon's Hymn* was attributed by the time of Bede, who then translated it into Latin, one need not believe any of these things in order to appreciate what the *Hymn* and its contexts reveal about contemporary conceptions of cosmic order and how this was reflected in the built environment.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not the Old English poem attributed to Cædmon was the source of the Latin translation, or is in fact a back-translation of Bede's Latin rendering, both texts offer a sense of how the architecture of the cosmos was 'written' by God,<sup>48</sup> presented in what O'Donnell describes as 'a very traditional Germanic poem', that is to say comparable with works written in other Germanic languages.<sup>49</sup> As a result both hymns, Latin and vernacular, display what Charles Abbott-Conway has called a 'complex architecture', indicative of the poet's profound interest in the 'intricacy and form of the world itself'.<sup>50</sup> The Colgrave and Mynors edition of the *Historia* sets out the Latin text as prose:

...quorum iste est sensus: 'Nunc laudare / debemus auctorem regni caelestis, potentiam Creatoris et consilium illius, facta Patris gloriae: quomodo ille, cum sit aeternus Deus, omnium miraculorum auctor extitit, qui primo filiis hominum caelum pro culmine tecti, dehinc terram Custos humani generis omnipotens creauit'. Hic est sensus, not autem ordo ipse uerborum, quae dormiens ille canebat.'

[...of which this is the general sense: 'Now we must praise the Maker of the heavenly kingdom, the power of the Creator and his counsel, the deeds of the Father of glory and how He, since he is the eternal God, was the Author of all marvels and first created the heavens as a roof for the children of men and then, the almighty Guardian of the human race, created the earth'. This is the sense but not the order of the words which he sang as he slept.]<sup>51</sup>

44 See, for example, Amodio, 'Res(is)ting the Singer'; Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature*; Kiernan, 'Reading Cædmon's "Hymn" With Someone Else's Glosses'.

45 *Cædmon's Hymn*, ed. by O'Donnell, pp. 48–49, 71.

46 Lester, 'The Caedmon Story and its Analogues', p. 236.

47 Andy Orchard supports the idea that Bede was recounting a piece of local tradition that had made its way from Whitby to Jarrow orally. See Orchard, 'Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation', p. 402.

48 Disenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, p. 13.

49 *Cædmon's Hymn*, ed. by O'Donnell, p. 39; see also discussion throughout this volume. Orchard also considers the possibility that the *Hymn* is a back-translation, 'albeit a skillful effort', in Orchard, 'Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation', p. 415.

50 Abbott-Conway, 'Structure and Idea in "Cædmon's Hymn"', pp. 45, 47.

51 *HE* IV. 24 (pp. 416–17).



God's first act is to fashion the skies as a celestial roof, before he creates the earthly plain and adorns it with vegetation, beasts, and humans. The Old English poem and the Latin maintain the same order of things:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,  
 meotodes meahte ond his modgeþanc,  
 weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,  
 ece drihten, or onstealde.  
 He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum  
 heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend,  
 þa middangeard, monncynnes weard,  
 ece drihten, æfter teode  
 frum foldan, frea ælmihtig.<sup>52</sup>

[Now we shall praise the ruler of the heavenly kingdom, God's might and his purpose, the work of the father of glory, as he, the eternal Lord, established the origin of every wonder. He first created heaven as a roof for the children of earth, the holy Creator, then the guardian of mankind, the eternal Lord, the Lord Almighty afterwards adorned the middle enclosure, the earth, with people.]

The poetics of the Old English text reinforce the interrelationship between its different elements: God, the heavens, the worshipper, and the poem itself. They are bound together, like the boards of Heorot, by the alliteration which establishes 'heofon to hrofe' (heaven as a roof), wrought by the 'halig scyppend' (holy creator), the 'heofonrices weard' (ruler of the heavenly kingdom), whom each recitant of the poem is called to 'herigean' (praise). On the one hand, this reflects the alliteration in the Latin text, in which we see the 'caelum' (heavens) established as a 'culmine' (roof) for men by the 'Custos humani' (guardian of humankind). On the other, there are numerous descriptions of the skies as a roof elsewhere in Old English poetry, indicating that the identification of the heavens as a cosmic roof was a trope well established in the vernacular tradition.<sup>53</sup> To give just a few examples, after Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden in *Genesis A*, God says that he will not deprive them of the sky, the 'hyrstedne hrof halgum tunglum' (roof of the heavens adorned with stars, 956), whilst the walls of the Red Sea parted by Moses in *Exodus* stretch up to the 'wolcna hrof' (roof of the clouds, 298), and the three youths burned by Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel* appeal to God in majesty 'ofer worulde hrof' (above the roof of the world, 406). This is the place to which the angel returns after they have been rescued: the 'heanne hrof heofona rices' (high roof of the heavenly kingdom, 441).<sup>54</sup>

52 All references to *Cædmon's Hymn* based on *Cædmon's Hymn*, ed. by O'Donnell, p. 208, using O'Donnell's probable West-Saxon recension archetype. Punctuation is mine, andwynns have been replaced with 'w'.

53 Isaac, 'The Date and Origin of *Cædmon's Hymn*'.

54 All references to *Daniel* from *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by Krapp, pp. 89–107, and to *Exodus* from *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas. Interestingly, *Cædmon's Hymn* and these examples also give a very clear impression that the roof of the heavens 'is placed between God and humanity'; see discussion in Abbott-Conway,



What this may suggest is the concept of a cosmological hierarchy of 'halls', within which each individual had an established role. The greatest of halls is middle-earth itself, roofed by the heavens, whose creation, as Jennifer Neville has observed, is fittingly compared in Bede's commentary *In Genesim* with the 'human act of constructing a building — much like the Old English poetic vision of the universe as a structure with a timbered roof'.<sup>55</sup> In his commentary on the first verse of the first chapter of *Genesis*, which describes the establishment of the heavens and the earth, Bede writes that:

Et quem in ipso conditionis initio caelum et terram creasse narrat, tanta celeritate operationis omnipotentem esse declarat cui uoluisse fecisse est. Nam humana fragilitas cum aliquid operatur, uerbi gratia cum domum aedificamus, in principio operis materiam preparamus et post hoc principium fodimus in altum; deinde immittimus lapides in fundamentum, deinde parietes augescantibus lapidum ordinibus apponimus; sicque paulatim ad perfectiorem operis propositi proficiendo peruenimus.

[And when it tells that he created heaven and earth in the very beginning of creation, by such great swiftness of work it declares that he, for whom to have willed is to have done, is omnipotent. For when human frailty does anything, for instance, when we build a house, at the beginning of the job we prepare the building materials, and after this beginning we dig down into the earth; then we set stones into the foundation, and when we build up the walls with rising course of stone; and so, progressing slowly, we come to the completion of the work that has been planned.]<sup>56</sup>

God himself stands outside of this hall, separated from humankind by the roof of the skies, through which heavenly messengers pass back and forth to interact with his creation. In so far as all rulers are subordinate to God, exerting power for their allotted span in the earthly kingdom, their own halls can be thought of microcosms of the cosmic hall. It is their duty, within these halls, to act according to the will of God. If, then, it is the duty of a king to emulate God, this carries with it the corresponding responsibility of a king to ensure that all of those halls in his power (physically and symbolically) are imitative of his own hall. This creates the image — if not necessarily the reality — of a hierarchy underpinned at the lowest level by classes of buildings and individuals whose existence is vital in underpinning the tier above, and so on upwards, until we reach a fictional Hrothgar in Heorot, or an historical Edwin in Yeavering.

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'Structure and Idea in "Cædmon's Hymn"', p. 43. On contemporary conceptions of the cosmos, see Disenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 13–55.

55 Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 67. As Conor O'Brien clarifies, 'this imagery functioned as a metaphorical aid rather than as an alternative to the authoritative image of the spherical earth he obtained from classical sources'; see O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, p. 76.

56 *In Genesim* from Bede, *Beda's Venerabilis Opera: Pars 2.1*, ed. by Jones, p. 3; translation from Bede, *On Genesis*, ed. and trans. by Kendall, p. 68.

The poetic treatment of both the Geatish and Danish landscapes in *Beowulf*, reflecting this idea, continually emphasizes the duty of rulers to support and maintain their subjects and the land in which they live. This is one of the reasons why Scyld is described as a ‘god cyning’ (good king, 11), a judgement also extended to Hrothgar (863) and Beowulf (2390). Before Beowulf inherits Hygelac’s kingdom we hear that the king ‘him gesealde seofan þusendo, bold ond breogostol’ (gave him seven thousand hides of land, a hall, and a lordly seat, 2195–96). Beowulf thereby takes his place beside Hygelac as co-ruler of his lands and people:

Him wæs bam samod  
on ðam leodscip lond gecynde,  
eard eðelriht, oðrum swiðor  
side rice þam ðær selra wæs.

[Within that nation, land — a domain and hereditary rights — lawfully belonged to both of them alike, though pre-eminently — the kingdom at large — to the one who was of nobler rank there.]

(*Beowulf* 2196–99)

When Beowulf takes the reins of power and becomes king after Hygelac’s death, his rule over the kingdom is described in terms that emphasize the responsibilities of a good king. The poet writes that Beowulf ‘geheold tela fiftig wintra — wæs ða frod cyning, eald eþelweard’ (held it well for fifty winters — that was a wise king, and an old guardian of the homeland, 2209–10). The destruction of Beowulf’s own hall at the end of this period, following the theft from the barrow, reveals the severity of the threat posed by the dragon when it first begins ‘gledum spiwan, beorht hofu bæarnan’ (to spew fire, to burn bright homes, 2312–13):

Ða wæs Biowulfe broga gecyðed  
snude to soðe, þæt his sylfes ham,  
bolda selest, brynewylmum mealt,  
giftol Geata.

[Swiftly and accurately then the horror was communicated to Beowulf that the best of buildings, his own home and the gift-throne of the Geats, was crumbling away in blazing billows of fire.]

(*Beowulf* 2324–27)

After the destruction of this hall, which is seen only briefly in the poem, engulfed in flame, it falls to Beowulf to conquer the dragon’s own subterranean ‘hall’, and in doing so (and suffering its poison) to exchange his own hall in life for the burial mound he inhabits in death.<sup>57</sup> The burning of this hall, and the subsequent destruction of the homes and bodies of the Geats, is mirrored by the destruction of Beowulf’s physical

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<sup>57</sup> Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, pp. 153, 165.

body on his burial pyre, which burns 'oð þæt he ða banhus gebrocen hæfde hat on hreðre' (until it had broken up that bone-house, hot at the heart, 3147–48).

Without wishing to dwell for too long on the centrality of halls in Old English poetry, it is also worth noting that *The Battle of Brunanburh* (c. 937) and *The Battle of Maldon* (c. 991), which describe 'real' historical events, however stylized, both indicate that men were summoned to battle on account of their duty to their homeland and their homes. The former describes how the breaking of the shield-wall at Brunanburh had been the custom of Æthelstan and his brother since their youth, 'þæt hi æt campe oft wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon, hord and hamas' (that they in battle often against every enemy had fought for their land, its treasures and homes, 9–10). The same is true of Byrhtnoth's speech to the viking messenger at Maldon, in which he announces his intention to defend 'eþel þysne, Æþelredes eard, ealdres mines folc and foldan' (this homeland, Æthelred's country, my lord's people and land, 52–54). Responsibility for this defence, as Aelfwine makes plain in his exhortation to Byrhtnoth's men after their lord has fallen in the battle, and as Wiglaf does after Beowulf succumbs to the dragon's venom, is a consequence of those familiar pledges they had made in the hall over mead.<sup>58</sup>

*Maxims II* tells us that a 'cýning sceal rice healdan' (a king must preserve a kingdom, 1), and that a 'cýning sceal on healle beagas dælan' (a king must deal out treasures in a hall, 28–29).<sup>59</sup> Buildings that were regarded as halls clearly varied considerably in form and function across the period, and during periods when the 'halls' of a king or local authority figure are not (or not yet) obvious in the archaeological record, it does not follow that the concept or culture of the hall was absent, but rather that this symbolism may have been accommodated within different kinds of physical structures. As a symbolic nexus, the hall and its associated customs bound together society on various levels that extended from the local and immediate to the regional, royal, and cosmic. The order and organization that it represented on both a micro- and macrocosmic level was reflected in the use of the same idea complex to embody the ordering of creation in *Beowulf* and *Cædmon's Hymn*. The universe itself, with God as its lord, offers a model for the relationship between the lord, the hall, and those who fell under its authority. This powerful, enduring, and implicitly hierarchical structure offered a framework for the relationship between people and place that may have originated with the small-scale distribution of plundered wealth amongst military elites, sharing out golden treasures, but was no less effective in the contexts of the fledgling late-Saxon state, when the spoils of war might include commodities, land, and power on an entirely different scale.

58 See *Maldon* lines 212–15, and *Beowulf* lines 2864–72. References to *Maldon* from *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. by Scragg.

59 See *Maxims II* in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, pp. 55–57.

## Minster Authority: Cædmon in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*

Bede's depiction of Cædmon and the place he inhabited within the minster authority of Abbess Hild (c. 614–680), may reveal similar ideas concerning the way in which the relationship between people and settlements was understood in middle-Saxon England. At the beginning of this episode in the *Historia*, Bede writes that Cædmon lived within Hild's spiritual jurisdiction, a feature which may be worth special consideration given the importance of minsters in the establishment and growth of the Church as centres of 'ecclesiastical organization and pastoral care', as well as being centres for 'economic growth, for most of the Anglo-Saxon period'.<sup>60</sup> John Blair describes a minster at this time as:

A complex ecclesiastical settlement which is headed by an abess, abbot, or man in priest's orders; which contains nuns, monks, priests, or laity in a variety of possible combinations, and is united to a greater or lesser extent by their liturgy and devotions; which may perform or supervise pastoral care to the laity, perhaps receiving dues and exerting parochial authority; and which may sometimes act as a bishop's seat, while not depending for its existence or importance on that function.<sup>61</sup>

When considering the physical appearance of these places in the landscape, it is important to bear in mind not only this complex organization, but also Blair's observation that minsters 'looked more like towns than any other kind of pre-Viking settlement', and showed 'a strong tendency to become real towns as the economy developed between the ninth and twelfth centuries'.<sup>62</sup> The infrastructure of the Church, Blair argues, was 'ultimately the basis for urbanisation'.<sup>63</sup>

The material contexts of accounts like this matter because 'things' in Bede's world are 'important chiefly because, as signs, metaphors, and symbols, they reveal social and cultural meanings shaped by human consciousness'.<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the following episode reveals a great deal about how Bede conceived of the relationship between spiritual and secular authority in the built environment. In his account of Abbess Hild, Bede writes that:

In huius monasterio abbatissae fuit frater quidam diuina gratia specialiter insignis. quia carmina religioni et pietati apta facere solebat ...

[In the monastery of this abbess there was a certain brother who was specially marked out by the grace of God, so that he used to compose godly and religious songs ... ]<sup>65</sup>

60 Blair, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', p. 35.

61 Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 3, see also pp. 79–134; 182–245.

62 Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 262.

63 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 103, also 113.

64 Frantzen, 'All Created Things', p. 115; these sentiments echo those found in Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', pp. 34–35.

65 *HE* iv. 24 (pp. 414–15).

The opening of this episode situates Cædmon in Abbess Hild's minster, but the episode itself is also situated within the portion of the *Historia* that recounts her life.<sup>66</sup> Thus Cædmon's position is clearly defined both within Hild's personal narrative, and within the social context of her minster, emphasizing the importance of the relationship between individuals and the buildings and settlements over which they exerted influence.<sup>67</sup> To Christopher Loveluck the story told by Bede clearly reflects an understanding of how settlements were organized in the eighth century, and had been in the seventh:

Here in a microcosm, we see a suite of hierarchical relations associated with different elements of the settlement and social hierarchy, ranging from the cowherd and his animals, his horizons focused on local affairs; to the reeve, who may have had both local and regional responsibilities at one or more estate centers; and to the abbess, a person at the heart of both secular aristocratic and ecclesiastical networks, and to a monastery that had recently hosted the synod which had resulted in the adoption of Roman Church practices across Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>68</sup>

Cædmon, a lowly tender of ungulates, returns from the beer-hall 'ad stabula iumentorum' (to the stable of the cattle) in Bede's Latin, and 'to neata scipene' (to the shed of the cattle) in the vernacular translation.<sup>69</sup> Though 'iumentorum' could conceivably refer to horses, these would still have been draft animals, and — as the Old English clarifies — are much more likely to be oxen.

There is a slight difference between the Latin and Old English texts when they describe the building from which Cædmon makes a hasty exit to avoid singing. Whereas Bede describes it as a 'domu conuiuii' (house of celebrations), the Old English translator uses the word 'gebeorscipe' (beer-party) to describe the festivities, justifying this indulgence by explaining there had been 'blisse intinga gedemed' (deemed cause for celebration).<sup>70</sup> The Old English translator then writes that Cædmon 'forlet þæt hus þæs gebeorscipes' (left that house of the beer-party).<sup>71</sup> The steps that Cædmon takes away from the secular hall, and the songs of the secular world, prepare him to take his place in the greater hall of God, where he will sing songs that glorify Him. This both acknowledges the role of the hall in human society, but also its subordination to the divine hall. Cædmon will receive his divine visitation outside of this hall, after all — not as a high king in a place of feasting, but as a cowherd in a lowly cattle-shed. Significantly, this association between Cædmon and the beasts of the field is never lost. The same idea is used to describe the process by which he transforms scripture into poetry, 'quasi

66 O'Donnell notes Lenore Abraham's observation that 'the sentence in which the abbess instructs him to become a monk straddles the story's geometric centre'; see *Cædmon's Hymn*, ed. by O'Donnell, p. 5; also Abraham, 'Cædmon's Hymn and the *Geþwærnyse* (fitness) of Things', pp. 338–39.

67 Johnson, 'The Ruin as Body-City Riddle', pp. 398–99.

68 Loveluck, 'Cædmon's World', pp. 150–51.

69 *HE* iv. 24 (p. 416); *OEHE* iv. 25 (p. 342).

70 *HE* iv. 24 (p. 416); *OEHE* iv. 25 (p. 342).

71 *OEHE* iv. 25 (p. 342).

mundum animal ruminado' (like some clean animal chewing the cud), emphasizing the blessing that he has received despite, or because of, his humble origins.<sup>72</sup>

Cædmon passes through layers of social hierarchy, each of which has its own corresponding locus within the minster authority. His immediate response the morning after experiencing this vision is to report directly to his superior:

Veniensque mane ad uilicum qui sibi praeerat quid doni percepisset indicauit, atque ad abbatissam perductus iussus est, multis doctioribus viris praesentibus, indicare somnium et dicere carmen, ut uniuersorum iudicio quid uel unde esset quod referebat probaretur. Visumque est omnibus caelestem ei a Domino concessam esse gratiam.

[In the morning he went to the reeve who was his master, telling him of the gift he had received, and the reeve took him to the abbess. He was then bidden to describe his dream in the presence of a number of the more learned men and also to recite his song so that they might all examine him and decide upon the nature and origin of the gift of which he spoke; and it seemed clear to all of them that the Lord had granted him heavenly grace.]<sup>73</sup>

Loveluck has noted that this passage takes us first from Cædmon, tending cattle in his byre, to a *vilicum* or *tungerefa*, probably the reeve entrusted with maintaining the estate on which Cædmon laboured, and from thence onwards to Abbess Hild herself.<sup>74</sup> He notes that the hierarchical relations here draw particular attention to 'different elements of the settlement and social hierarchy', revealing the status and social concerns of each individual: Cædmon with his cattle, the reeve with his 'local and regional responsibilities', and Hild herself as an abbess 'at the heart of both secular aristocratic and ecclesiastical networks'.<sup>75</sup> At each of these points Cædmon is presented as a subordinate to those who have power over him, and he passes from person to person, as he does from place to place, at the command of his superiors.

Following his instruction in holy orders, Cædmon begins a life of transforming Scripture into the most harmonious of verses, in such a way that 'doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat' (his teachers became in turn his audience).<sup>76</sup> From this point onwards Cædmon occupies a unique position within the community thanks to these divine gifts. By the end of his life Cædmon's status in the monastic community, in sharp contrast with that of a cattle-herder, allows him to dictate the place he occupies at the point of death:

Nam proproinquante hora sui decessus, XIII diebus praeueniente corporea infirmitate pressus est, adeo tamen moderate, ut et loqui toto eo tempore posset et ingredi. Erat autem in proximo casa, in qua infirmiores et qui prope morituri esse

72 HE iv. 24 (pp. 418–19).

73 HE iv. 24 (pp. 416–17).

74 Loveluck, 'Cædmon's World', pp. 150–51.

75 Loveluck, 'Cædmon's World', pp. 150–51.

76 HE iv. 24 (pp. 418–19).

uidebantur induci solebant. Rogavit ergo ministrum suum uespere incumbente nocte qua de saeculo erat exiturus, ut in ea sibi locum quiescendi praepararet; qui miratus cur hoc rogaret, qui nequaquam adhuc moriturus esse uidebatur, fecit tamen quod dixerat.

[When the hour of his departure drew near he was afflicted, fourteen days before, by bodily weakness, yet so slight that he was able to walk about and talk the whole time. There was close by a building to which they used to take those who were infirm or who seemed to be at the point of death. On the night on which he was to die, as evening fell, he asked his attendant to prepare a place in this building where he could rest. The attendant did as Cædmon said though he wondered why he asked, for he did not seem to be by any means at the point of death.]<sup>77</sup>

Cædmon's request to be brought into the hospice prefaces his demand for the Eucharist, so that he can prepare for bodily death and 'uitae alterius ingressui' (entrance into the next life).<sup>78</sup> Following this course of events from our first glimpse of Cædmon, we trace a path from secular drinking hall, to cattle byre, to monastery, to hospice, and then — through the grace of the Eucharist — into heaven itself, and the presence of God. This sequence takes into account individuals at every level of society, secular and ecclesiastical, as well as a number of the buildings in which they lived and died.

In Bede's account there is a clear sense of the cosmos and its relationship with human society and the buildings inhabited by humans, reflecting the same ideas we have already encountered in the *Hymn* itself. We know that the ideas expressed in the *Hymn* concerning the nature of the universe as a roofed structure are concurrent with its depiction elsewhere in Old English literature, and have seen that the relationship between lords, halls, land, and people is likely to have formed an integral part of this concept. This would support the conclusion that Bede's depiction of settlements and society in this episode broadly represented his contemporary world, albeit in largely idealized terms, and thus to a certain extent contemporary attitudes towards the relationship between individuals and the places they inhabited.

## Building the English Church in *De Templo*

Bede's interest in the long-established metaphor which expressed connections between the various individuals who made up the body of the Church, and the various materials from which physical churches were constructed, is evident throughout his writing, but perhaps nowhere more so than in *De Templo* (c. 729–731), which builds on his earlier work in *De Tabernaculo* (c. 721–725).<sup>79</sup> The former has recently been the subject of in-depth study by Conor O'Brien, building on the work of Jennifer O'Reilly, who has shown how Bede 'used the temple to promote his vision of cosmic, ecclesiastical,

<sup>77</sup> HE IV. 24 (pp. 418–20).

<sup>78</sup> HE IV. 24 (pp. 420–21).

<sup>79</sup> Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, p. xvii; Bede, *On the Tabernacle*, trans. by Holder, p. xvi.



and individual unity through and with Christ.<sup>80</sup> In *De Templo*, Bede explores the idea of the Temple of Jerusalem as a metaphor for numerous figures including the body of Christ, the body of the Church, and the soul of the individual, as well as the relationship between all of these and more besides — a series of connections that was already well established in Scripture.<sup>81</sup> Though this was by no means Bede's invention, and had already received attention from various early Christian writers and exegetes, his treatment ensured it a long lease of life in early English texts.<sup>82</sup> Central to the theme of *De Templo* is the following principle concerning the nature of Christ:

Si ergo ille templum Dei per assumptam humanitatem factus est et nos templum Dei per inhabitantem spiritum eius in nobis efficitur, constat utique quia figuram omnium nostrum et ipsius domini uidelicet et membrorum eius quae nos sumus templum illud materiale tenuit, sed ipsius tamquam lapidis angularis singulatier electi et pretiosi in fundamento fundati, nostri autem tamquam lapidum uiuorum superaedificatorum super fundamentum apostolorum et prophetarum, hoc est super ipsum dominum.

[If, therefore, he became the Temple of God by assuming human nature and we become the Temple of God through his Spirit dwelling in us, it is quite clear that the material temple was a figure of us all, that is, both of the Lord himself and his members which we are. But <it was a figure> of him as the uniquely chosen and precious cornerstone laid in the foundation, and of us as the living stones built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, i.e. on the Lord himself.]<sup>83</sup>

These lines refer to Christ's description of himself as the Temple of God which if destroyed would be rebuilt in three days, though the same motif of Christ as temple and foundation can also be found elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>84</sup>

The influence of this theme in vernacular and Latin works will resonate strongly in the next two chapters, and its contribution to the homiletic tradition is clearly visible in the later homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan. In his second series homily *In dedicatione ecclesiae*, Ælfric refers to the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21. 42). Here Jesus, himself referring in turn to Psalm 118, tells his disciples that 'the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner', foretelling his own crucifixion and subsequent importance as the spiritual foundation of the Church.<sup>85</sup> In recalling this parable, Ælfric writes that 'Crist is se lybbenda stan þone awurpon ða ungeleaffullan iudei' (Christ is the living stone that the unbelieving Jews cast away), 'þe us eall gehylt' (who supports us all); 'He is se grundweall þære gastlican

80 O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, p. 206.

81 Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, p. xxxiii.

82 Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, pp. xxiii–xxviii; O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 45–46.

83 All references to *De Templo* from Bede, *Bedae Venerabilis Opera: Pars 2.2a, Opera Exegetica*, ed. by Hurst, pp. 141–224; *De Templo* 1.1, (p. 147, l. 18–26); Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, pp. 5–6.

84 Matthew 26. 61; Mark 14. 58; John 2. 19.

85 *Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes, hic factus est in caput anguli*; see discussion of this motif in the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan in Johnson, 'The Ruin as Body-City Riddle', pp. 399–400.

cýrcan' (He is the foundation of the spiritual Church).<sup>86</sup> Ælfric draws on Matthew again in other homilies to explain the role of Simon Peter in the foundation of the Church, taking the opportunity to explain Jesus' pun on the similarity between the Greek name *petros* (given to St Peter the Apostle), and the Greek for rock, *petra*.<sup>87</sup>

Drihten cwæð to petre, 'þu eart stænen', for þære strençþe his geleafan and for anrædnysse his andetnysse he underfeng þone naman.<sup>88</sup>

[The Lord said to Peter, 'you are the rock', and because of his belief in his strength and acknowledgement of his resolution he received that name.]

Reference to the same passage appears again in Ælfric's second series homily for the mass celebrating the feast of Saint Peter:

Crist cwæð to him, betwux oðrum wordum, 'Ic secge ðe þu eart petrus, and ofer ðisne stan ic getimbrige mine cýrcan' [...] Ær ðan fyrste wæs his nama Simon, ac drihten him gesette þisne naman Petrus, þæt is stænen.<sup>89</sup>

[Christ said to him, amongst other words, 'I say that you are Peter, and on this rock I shall build my Church' [...] Before then his name was Simon, but the Lord gave him the name Peter, which means rock.]

Ælfric goes on to explain the extended significance of this metaphor, that 'eal cristen folc [...] eart stænen' (all Christian folk [...] are stones, 168–69) from which the Church is built. The same idea is also prominent in the *In dedicatione ecclesiae* homily, where members of the congregation are appealed to as 'ða liflican stanas þe beoð ofer criste getimbrode on gastlicum husum' (the living stones which are built up over Christ as a spiritual home, 108–09). The righteous bear the weight of one another just as the stones of the 'eorðlicere cýrcan lið stan ofer stane, and ælc berð oþerne' (earthly church lie stone upon stone, and each bears up the other, 125–26).<sup>90</sup> As O'Brien writes, these 'serried rows of stones... represent the generations of the faithful who succeed each other in the present Church in turn'.<sup>91</sup>

86 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 335–45 (lines 93–94, 130–31, 229). The same motif also appears elsewhere in Ælfric's homilies, for instance, Christ is similarly described as the *gastlican stan* ('holy stone') that gave Moses water in the desert; see Ælfric's homily for *Dominica in Media Quadragesime*, in the above volume, pp. 110–26 (lines 215–20). Christ is again described as the *grundweal* of the Church in his *Passio Petri et Pauli*; see Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 388–99 (lines 64–71).

87 Matthew 16. 18.

88 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 388–99 (lines 60–61).

89 *In Festiuitate Sancti Petri Apostoli*, III. *Kalendas Iulii*, in Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden pp. 221–29 (lines 161–67).

90 This same metaphor appears elsewhere in Ælfric's homilies to refer to good Christians as walls of humility, and — conversely — the wicked as the scattered stones of a fallen temple. See *Dominica XII Post Pentecosten* in Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 249–54 (lines 76–82); and Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 410–17 (lines 17–27).

91 O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 70, 154.

The idea that individuals who constituted the Church were its living stones is well established in early Christian literature, and had clearly been comfortably accommodated into the vernacular homiletic tradition by at least the time of Ælfric. It is evident throughout *De Templo* that this idea was not solely limited to building stones. Every part of the temple, from its stone foundations, timbers, and roof rafters, through to its ornate decoration, is considered an important element of its structure.<sup>92</sup> Although a sustained discussion of *De Templo* is not the focus of this chapter, quoting the following passage in full helps to give some impression of the relationship Bede describes between various building materials in the work as a whole, and how these contribute to the structure of the temple:

In aedificanda domo domini primo sunt ligna et lapides caedendi de monte quia eos quos in fide ueritatis instituere quaerimus primo necesse est ut abrenuntiare diabolo ac de sorte primae praeuocationis in qua nati sunt doceamus renascendo erui. Deinde quaerendi sunt lapides pretiosi et grandes atque in fundamentum templi ponendi ut meminerimus abdicata conuersatione priori eorum in omnibus uitam moresque inspicere eos nostris auditoribus imitandos proponere quos per uirtutem humilitatis specialiter domino adhaerere nouerimus quos inuincibili mentis stabilitate quasi quadratos quodammodo atque ad omnes temptationum incursus immobiles perdurare conspiciamus quos pretiosos et grandes merito ac fama comperimus. Post fundamentum uero talibus ac tantis lapidibus compositum aedificanda est domus praeparatis diligentius lignis ac lapidibus ac decenti ordine collocatis quae olim de prisco suo situ uel radice fuerant abstracta quia post prima fidei rudimenta post collocata in nobis iuxta exemplum sublimium uiuorum fundamenta humilitatis addendus est in altum paries operum bonorum quasi superimpositis sibi inuicem ordinibus lapidum ambulando ac proficiendo de uirtute in uirtutem. Vel certe lapides fundamenti grandes pretiosi quadrati primi sunt ut supra dixeram ecclesiarum magistri qui ab ipso domino uerbum audiere salutis, superpositi autem ordines lapidum siue lignorum sequentes suo quique tempore sacerdotes ac doctores quorum uel praedicatione ac ministerio fabrica crescit ecclesiae uel ordinatur uirtutibus.

92 The construction of the Temple from these timbers is also comparable with Bede's description of the construction of the ark in his commentary on Genesis. Bede writes that *Porro Noe fabricator arcae uel ipsum Dominum ac saluatorem nostrum uel unumquemque deuotum eiusdem sanctae ecclesiae rectorem typice denuntiat. Fac tibi, inquit, arcam de lignis leuigatis. Non solum homines qui in arca saluati sunt sed et animantia quae eam pariter intrarunt, ipsa etiam ligna de quibus facta est fideles sanctae ecclesiae mystice denuntiant. Ligna ergo de quibus facta est "leuigata" esse iubentur, quia quicumque in fabrica ecclesiae ad fidem ueniendo imponitur* ('Furthermore, Noah, the builder of the ark, allegorically represents either our Lord and Saviour himself or any devout ruler of this same holy Church. *Make an ark of timber planed smooth*, God says. Not only the men who were saved in the ark, but also the animals which entered it at the same time, and even the timbers of which it was made signify mystically the faithful of the holy Church. Therefore, the timbers of which it was made are commanded to be *planed smooth*, because everyone is laid down in the construction of the Church by coming to the faith'); *In Genesis* from Jones, ed., *Beda's Venerabilis Opera: Pars 2.1, Opera Exegetica*, pp. 104–05; Bede, *On Genesis*, ed. and trans. by Kendall, pp. 174–75.

[In building the house of the Lord, first of all the wood and stone must be hewn from the mountain because those whom we seek to train in the true faith we must first teach to renounce the devil and escape, by being reborn, from the fate of the first transgression in which they were born. Then we have to look for large, precious stones and lay them in the foundation of the temple, so that after they have renounced their former way of life, we may remember in all things to watch over their life and conduct, and set before our hearers for imitation those whom we know to cling in a special way by the virtue of humility to the Lord, people whom we see persevering unflinchingly with invincible constancy of spirit like squared stone, in a certain sense, and whom by their merit and repute we have found to be large and precious stones. But after the foundation which is made up of stones of such quality and size, the house must be built with wood and stones very carefully dressed and laid in the proper arrangement, <wood and stones> which had once been removed from their original position or roots, because, after the first rudiments of the faith and after the foundations of humility have been laid in us after the example of men of high virtue, there remains to continue upwards the wall of good works, superimposing on each other, as it were, courses of stones by the life we lead and by advancing from virtue to virtue. Or at all events the large precious square stones are, as I said above, the first masters of the churches who heard the word of salvation from the Lord himself. The courses of stones or timber laid upon them were the priests and teachers who followed, each in his own time, and by whose preaching and ministry the fabric of the Church grows of by whose virtues it is shaped.]<sup>93</sup>

It is essential to the structure of the Church that those responsible for its construction and maintenance should recognise the importance of its various constituent parts. As reiterated in the translations and prefaces made at the time of Alfred and his successors, to recognize this was to understand that different individuals possessed different gifts and qualities that were necessary to support and maintain Christian order.<sup>94</sup> This vision of the temple, for Bede, 'showed that the Church was a universal body', and 'situated Christian Anglo-Saxons within a history much wider than their own'.<sup>95</sup>

This raises obvious questions about the extent to which we should think of Bede's Temple, with all of its constituent parts, as representative of human society throughout Christendom. Addressing this issue, Joel Rosenthal has argued that it is clear from Bede's works that he thought of the 'separate components of human society' as part 'of a grand design, a larger unified construct'.<sup>96</sup> Thus, although the model *De Templo* presents is an idealized one, it is unsurprising that it reflects the same ordering found in episodes such as his account of Cædmon. As Henry Mayr-Harting noted, in terms

93 *De Templo* 1. 4 (pp. 155–56, lines 344–70); Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, pp. 16–17.

94 See discussion in Chapter 4, pp. 136–55.

95 O'Brien, *Bede's Temple*, pp. 71–72.

96 Rosenthal, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History' p. 3.

that were endorsed by Jennifer O'Reilly, when *De Templo* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are read together they 'form a kind of diptych' expressing the parallel development of both the universal Church and the Church in early medieval England.<sup>97</sup> Bede was writing an ecclesiastical history of *all* 'English' people, and as John Hines notes, 'clearly perceived, or conceived of' them as a unified body, a '*gens* or *natio Anglorum*' — he was not writing an ecclesiastical history of distinct peoples.<sup>98</sup> This included even those who did not belong to an established and well-organized ecclesiastical hierarchy, which had not yet been fostered everywhere in the country by the early eighth century, as his comments on Sussex reveal.<sup>99</sup> This *gens Anglorum* was in turn part of the broader Church, at the centre of which, as Nicholas Howe argued, stood heavenly Jerusalem, with the bright beacon of earthly Rome standing as a capital radiating heavenly light out over its spiritual empire.<sup>100</sup> For Bede, the boundaries of this empire were limited only by the efforts of its missionary soldiers, pushing outwards into unknown territories armed with the cross, and constructing new outposts in the ruins of Rome's earthly empire. This is not to say that secular institutions with secular concerns were not important within this model, but rather that they should be considered 'subordinate to the higher architecture of the City of God', and thus to have followed 'a course of historical development that was usually explicable in rational terms'.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, all parts of society were spiritually subordinate to God, and had their own part to play in the construction and maintenance of God's kingdom on earth. *De Templo*, when considered in this light, reveals much about Bede's understanding of the complex relationship between the secular and religious spheres of mid-Saxon England. When read in parallel, the exegetical text can be used as a cryptanalytical key, unlocking the principles governing the organization of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and laying bare the foundations and walls of the later work to expose the stones and timbers from which it is built: anchored in the material, speaking of the social, and ultimately reflecting the architecture of the spiritual world beyond the earthly realm.

So far in this chapter we have considered connections between Roman stone and the building culture of the Church, and the orthodoxy of timber feasting halls as a staple feature of secular society. We have seen how *Cædmon's Hymn* and other Old English poems reflect conceptions of the cosmos as a roofed hall, and how Bede's framework for the poem in the *Historia* reflects a complex understanding of social

97 Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St Benedict, and Social Class*, p. 13; endorsed in Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. by Connolly, p. xvii.

98 Hines, 'The Becoming of the English', p. 51. See also discussion in Harris, 'The Alfredian World History and Anglo-Saxon Identity', p. 484; Fanning, 'Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas'; Brooks, *Bede and the English*.

99 As he notes, the kingdom of the South Saxons, ... *iam aliquot annis absque episcopo manens ministerium sibi episcopale ab Occidentalium Saxonum antistite quaerit* ('... having been for several years without a bishop, receives Episcopal ministrations from the bishop of the West Saxons', *HE* v. 23, pp. 558–59).

100 Howe, 'Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 156, 168. See also discussion in Ó Carragáin, *The City of Rome and the World of Bede*; and Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, on Rome pp. 59, 70, 74–79, and on Jerusalem pp. 80–83.

101 Rosenthal, 'Bede's Ecclesiastical History', p. 3.

hierarchy and the hierarchy of the built environment. *De Templo* helps to clarify some of these relationships, revealing Bede's understanding of the different roles that earthly and spiritual authority had to play in contemporary society. Just as the structure of the universal Church was formed out of stones and timbers, so too was the fabric of society. The stones that formed its foundations were of the greatest importance, but these served as foundations for lofty timbers that acted as its walls, the two being joined together to constitute the structure of the building as a whole. The Church was the most important institution in early medieval England to Bede, but he recognised that its strength lay in maintaining a symbiotic relationship with those secular institutions that maintained social order. Within this relationship the stone structures of the Church complemented the wooden buildings of secular society. The impression that emerges from this model is not, therefore, one of opposition between these two groups, but of their mutual contribution to an envisioned whole. We see women and men within their buildings and settlements working together as part of the cosmic hierarchy, within which each element had a vital role to play in supporting the divinely ordained system, which had itself been established at the beginning of time to maintain order beneath the shelter of the heavenly *hrof*.

## Structuring the Everyday in the Exeter Book Elegies

Representations of non-elite settlements and their buildings are relatively few and far between in early English texts, and when lower-status buildings do appear it is generally as a backdrop to great halls. Even among these, only Heorot is described in any significant detail.<sup>102</sup> As considered in the previous chapter, the literary record shows enthusiasm for the *locus amoenus*, but there are few signs of rural settlements to be found. Nevertheless, as I will go on to suggest, there may be faint traces of physical structures and settlements in the Exeter Book elegies that reveal attitudes towards these places and their structures in both rural and proto-urban contexts. It is fitting, for this reason, to discuss them here before going on to consider the *wīc* or *emporia* sites that had their heyday in the mid-Saxon period, and the fortified sites identified as burhs that went on to achieve greater prominence in the ninth and tenth centuries as fortified places of refuge, and as fortified settlements. These kinds of strongholds and settlements have received a great deal of attention in more recent years, as a wealth of new evidence concerning their origins and development has been revealed through excavation. They are, however, notably absent from both contemporary texts, which have little to say about their form and function, and from modern studies of these texts. I will argue that although literary works and other documentary sources have relatively little to say about them, this in itself is important because of what it may reveal about their emergence in the landscape, their relationship with existing structures of power, and the rate at which their importance rose and fell.

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102. Raleigh-Radford, 'The Saxon House', p. 27.



The vernacular architecture of early medieval England dealt almost exclusively in timber, as we have seen. Bede's *De Templo* may also indicate that he thought about secular society, with its timber buildings and settlements, as corresponding with the timbers used to construct the Temple. The stone foundations of this conceptual building, likewise, correlate with the stone buildings that were characteristic of many ecclesiastical buildings, and reinforced the link between the Church and Rome through their materiality. Elsewhere, in *The Wanderer*, there is evidence to suggest that dilapidated stone buildings occupy an uncertain position between 'natural' landscape feature and human construction, primarily as a consequence of whether or not they serve any purpose in human society, and whether or not they have been maintained accordingly. Recent work by John Blair has drawn attention to the proportion of buildings 'invisible to us' that must have existed 'in considerable numbers', which may have their counterparts in texts like these, perhaps positioned at an unstable point between nature and culture.<sup>103</sup> These might have included turf-walled buildings, which are missing 'almost completely' from the archaeological record, and timber buildings resting on supports of various kinds that were not earth-fast.<sup>104</sup> He suggests that many buildings may have been both 'more opulently furnished than we tend to assume', but also 'more lightly constructed'.<sup>105</sup> Given the process of reversion through which stone may have been thought to return to the earth from whence it came, it is also worth considering the likelihood that wooden buildings continued to be associated with trees after their transformation into timber. This hypothesis is supported by terms for timber building discussed by Carole Biggam, which include *breden* ('made of planks'), *treowen* ('made of wood' or 'trees'), and *stoccen* ('made of logs'), which draw attention to the essentially lignal and arboreal properties of most buildings.<sup>106</sup> Some evidence of these associations can be found in the Exeter Book elegies *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*, which may suggest that wooden buildings were thought to retain certain properties of living trees that extended beyond their superficial transformation into building materials. This would parallel a number of wooden objects in the Exeter Book Riddles (as well as the tree in *The Dream of the Rood*) which self-consciously draw attention to their past lives as trees of the forest.<sup>107</sup>

The circumstances of the suffering woman in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as in *The Wife's Lament*, are difficult to establish with any certainty, though a number of suggestions have been made about how she arrived at her current situation, separated from her beloved on an island 'fenne biworpen' (surrounded by fens, 5), by the 'beaducafa'

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103 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 51.

104 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 51–67.

105 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 64.

106 See discussion in Biggam, 'Grund to Hrof', p. 53. As if to complete this triangle of trees, buildings, and human occupants, it is also worth considering terms which directly connect the bodies of humans with the physical forms of trees. See discussion in Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*, and Bintley, 'Trees and Woodland in Anglo-Saxon Culture', pp. 63–91.

107 Discussed in Bintley, 'Brunken of Bearwe'; also Dale, *The Natural World in the Exeter Book Riddles*, pp. 103–21.



(one brave in battle, 11), who is generally taken to be Eadwacer.<sup>108</sup> Without becoming embroiled in the wide-ranging discussions about the particulars of this narrative, I do want to discuss one feature of the poem that has been a focus of some critical attention. After the captive woman has described her unhappy circumstances, she tells us that:

Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum hogode;  
þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,  
þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,  
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.

[I have grieved for my Wulf with distant longings, when there was rainy weather, and I sat lamenting, when the one bold in battle laid his boughs about me, that was a joy to me, however that was also painful to me.]

(*Wulf and Eadwacer* 9–12)

One word that has intrigued and puzzled numerous translators and commentators is *bogum*, which is translated here in its most literal sense as 'boughs'.<sup>109</sup> In one sense, this word could suggest a sexual encounter in which the 'boughs' or limbs of *beaducafa* have been entwined those of the speaker.<sup>110</sup> In another, they might also refer to the timbers of a building in which she has been imprisoned, whose shelter offers security of a sort, but which is equally loathsome. This one line, then, may suggest a direct connection between tree, human, and building, describing how this woman has been held prisoner both within a building, and by the physical power of the *beaducafa*.

Similar ideas may be present in *The Wife's Lament*, a work of similar complexity and obscurity, whose speaker — as Stanley Greenfield saw it — had been imprisoned by her husband as a result of strife caused by his kinsmen.<sup>111</sup> The well-known landscape of this poem is of particular interest, as the speaker describes how she occupies a 'wuda bearwe' (forest grove, 27), and more specifically an

108 All references to *Wulf and Eadwacer* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, p. 284.

109 As noted in *The Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, p. 173. Klinck points out that this is only used as a term for the limbs of a beast, which is nevertheless in keeping with the 'the animal imagery in terms of which the male figures in the poem are depicted'. The Dictionary of Old English notes the use of *bog* (sense 1. c.) to gloss *lacertus* (upper arm) in the Antwerp Glosses.

110 Shared terms for human and tree/plant bodies in Old English aside from *bog* (which may be used of an arm, shoulder, bough, twig, branch or shoot) include *lim* (which may refer to both branches and limbs), *wipo-ban* ('willow-bone' or 'withy-bone'), *tan* (which may be used of a toe, a twig, a rod, stick, or branch), and *teors* (which can refer to a reed or a penis); see definitions in the *Dictionary of Old English Online*, and in Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Commentary can also be found in Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*, pp. 143–44, and comparison with the ON tradition pp. 135–36. For a much later direct comparison with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, consider the consummation scene in *Troilus and Criseyde*, III. 1226–32, in which Troilus is likened to a tree, and Criseyde to honeysuckle: 'And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste, / Bitrent and wryth the sote wode-binde, / Gan eche of hem in armes other winde'; text from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson.

111 Greenfield, 'The Wife's Lament Reconsidered', p. 907. For a similar reading see Renoir, 'A Reading Context for *The Wife's Lament*', p. 237.

‘eorðscrafe/eorðscrafu’ (earth-grave, 28, 36) or ‘eorðsele’ (earth-hall, 29) within this grove, located ‘under actreo’ (under an oak tree, 28, 36), a space which is nevertheless of sufficient size to enable her to pass ‘geond’ (through, 36) it in her daily wanderings.<sup>112</sup> The earth-grave under the oak tree, set within the grove, lies in a valley surrounded by ‘dena dimme, duna uphea’ (dim dales and high hills, 30), and potentially encircled by ‘bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne’ (a sharp hedge, overgrown by briars, 31).<sup>113</sup> It is, she tells us, a ‘wic wynna leas’ (place lacking in joy 32).

Interpretations of this environment and what it reveals about the circumstances of the woman have been wide-ranging. They have included possibilities such as caves, graves, and barrows, all set within a forest grove.<sup>114</sup> Karl Wentersdorf, who both proposed and dismissed the possibility that the poem might refer to one of the ubiquitous Sunken Featured Buildings (SFBs or *Grubenhäuser*) found throughout early medieval England, and elsewhere in Europe, did so on the grounds that there would not be space within a *Grubenhau*s for her to walk *geond* it.<sup>115</sup> This is not the case. *Grubenhäuser* were not of any particularly fixed size, being adapted to the landscape and soil type in which they were constructed, and to suit the purposes of their builders. Even if the woman’s place of confinement is especially small, there is no reason to suppose that *geond* is used without irony — one can walk great distances in a small space without getting very far at all. No matter how far she travels, she is compelled to remain here throughout the length of the ‘sumorlangne dæg’ (summer-long day, 37). In all other aspects the description of her surroundings could support the reading that she is occupying a disguised *Grubenhau*s.<sup>116</sup> The *eorðscrafe* is the pit into which it is dug, and the *actreo* above her refers to the split timbers from which the framework of the building has been constructed.<sup>117</sup> To say this is not to deny the fact that comparisons with graves and barrows are implied within these terms, as it is

112 All references to *The Wife’s Lament* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 328–30; see also *The Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, pp. 93–94; Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 168–76; here Garner discusses the dwelling place of the Wife, though not as a building.

113 Blair has recently suggested that *burgtun* here ‘seems to denote an outpost, lookout point, or other satellite of an important central place’, and that we should understand these as ‘guard posts making sure that she never leaves her prison’, reflecting ‘the administrative geography of Mercia in its age of greatness’. This is certainly possible, though the distance between the *burh-tunas* discussed by Blair could prove problematic if one assumes that the wife is discussing her immediate surroundings. See Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 82–84, 201–19.

114 Green, ‘Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife’s Lament*’, p. 125; Johnson, ‘*The Wife’s Lament* as Death-Song’, p. 69; Wentersdorf, ‘The Situation of the Narrator’, p. 365; Greenfield, ‘The Wife’s Lament Reconsidered’, p. 907; Jensen, ‘“The Wife’s Lament’s” *eorðscraf*’.

115 Wentersdorf, ‘The Situation of the Narrator’, p. 366.

116 Old English lexical evidence, as Joseph Harris notes, is certainly ‘general enough to admit this interpretation’. See Harris, ‘A Note on *eorðscraf*/*eorðsele* and Current Interpretations of *The Wife’s Lament*’, p. 205.

117 The *Grubenhau*s need not be *under* a tree at all, as Paul Battles has interpreted these readings (and found implausible), if the tree is in fact the building itself. See Battles, ‘Of Graves, Caves, and Subterranean Dwellings’, p. 269.

because of her extraction from her usual circumstances that her home has become exactly this: a 'gravelike' space in which she endures a 'living death'.<sup>118</sup>

The landscape around this building has been similarly transformed. It is, as she says, a 'wic wynna leas', a phrase translated above as 'joyless place'. However, if 'place' is one meaning of *wīc*, then others also include 'town' or 'village'.<sup>119</sup> It may be that the Wife is describing a 'joyless settlement' in terms indicating a harsh and remote landscape that is natural in every respect, albeit 'surreal', because it holds no joy for her — it is no place of 'holdra freonda' (loyal friends, 17).<sup>120</sup> If this is a making-strange of the *wīc* she occupies, one might consider the rest of the surviving environment in similar terms, and what initially seems to be a place of woodland trees, a 'wuda bearwe', and an 'eordscraef' (earthen-grove, 28), may conceal a landscape of buildings constructed from timber. Alternatively — or simultaneously — it could be understood as a human forest, a Birnam Wood of men and women alien to the Wife who are collectively responsible for her confinement. This is in keeping with the way some commentators have approached the poem. Green went so far as to suggest that it was the hills of the valley itself, 'dena dimme, duna uphea', which 'in the speaker's metaphoric associations constitute a fortress',<sup>121</sup> 'bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxnes' — although this phrase might equally indicate a wooden fence or palisade surrounding the settlement. Indeed, aside from death or a locked door, just such an enclosure would seem to be the only means by which the woman is kept here, as a prisoner in this place, singing her own ceremonial 'giedd' (lay, 1). Jane Chance has suggested that it is unusual for this word, often used to indicate a song sung on a ceremonial occasion such as a banquet or funeral, to have been used in *The Wife's Lament* in a context apparently lacking in human company.<sup>122</sup> If read ironically, this may support a reading in which the woman does not mourn the 'absence of society', so much as her place in a society from which she is necessarily absent, and thus as good as dead.<sup>123</sup> This is perhaps another reason why attention is

118 Johnson, 'The Wife's Lament as Death-Song', pp. 71, 78; see also discussion in Jensen, "'The Wife's Lament's" *eordscraf*.

119 Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, pp. 1212–13; for a discussion of the full range of meanings see Rumble, 'Notes on the Linguistic and Onomastic Characteristics', pp. 1–2.

120 Johnson, 'The Wife's Lament as Death-Song', p. 69.

121 *Græf*, as Gelling noted, is a word meaning 'grove' in many place name contexts; see Gelling, *Place Names in the Landscape*, pp. 192–94. It is possible that the word is used in line 28 as a transition from the *wuda bearwe* (27) and the *actreo* of (28) to the *eordsele* (29). In this respect it could simultaneously house implications of both an earthen-grove of earth-fast buildings, and an earth-grave beneath the timbers of a *Grubenhaus*; Green, 'Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife's Lament*', p. 125. Lines referring to *bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxnes* may indicate the same sort of thorny hedges known as *zaun* which the Continental Saxons constructed to enclose 'private property' in the Boulonnais; see Rouche, 'The Early Middle Ages in the West', pp. 411–549 (p. 438). Similar hedges were also used extensively in early medieval England. See Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire*, p. 41; Hooke, 'Medieval Forests and Parks in Southern and Central England', pp. 19–32; Muir, *Ancient Trees, Living Landscapes*, pp. 120–38; Muir, *Woods, Hedgerows and Leafy Lanes*, pp. 131–35.

122 Chance, *Woman as Hero*, p. 83.

123 Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 88.

drawn to one particular oak tree at the heart of the forest grove. Perhaps the Wife is here — like one forest tree among many, alone, but in company.<sup>124</sup>

Traces of architecture in *The Husband's Message* are even more obscure than those found in *The Wife's Lament*, if they are to be found here at all. One possibility concerns the wooden stave on which some think that the poem's message is written. The stave announces its intention to bring two separated lovers together again, to fulfil oaths and vows made in a time before:

...þenden git moston on meoduburgum  
eard weardigan, an lond bugan,  
freondscype fremman.<sup>125</sup>

[...when you two might still together live among the festive towns, both dwell in one land, and love one other.]

(*The Husband's Message* 17–19)

In the poem's present, the Husband finds himself in possession of all of the things a nobleman could wish for, including gold, hall-joys, and the means to maintain his retinue. He has conquered his grief and no longer lacks 'meara ne maðma ne meododreama' (horses, nor treasures, nor joys of the hall, 46). His position is now such that he can 'mid elpeode eþel healeð, fægre foldan' (hold a fine estate amongst the foreigners, and maintain a homestead, 37–38). There is one fairly minor detail worth noting here, which is the word the wood uses to describe its own kind: 'treocyn'. Whilst damage to this part of the manuscript makes interpretation of the surrounding text difficult, it is unlikely that the missing script would significantly destabilize the meaning of this word.<sup>126</sup> It is likely being used by the message carved in wood to indicate its arboreal origins, like the trees in Exeter Book Riddle 21 or *The Dream of the Rood*. The tragic irony of the elegy is that in the course of service to its lord, in which it has been sent over the waters to summon his beloved, it too has been separated from its own kin. Though she may journey back to the Husband to enjoy a new homeland with him, the messenger itself, divorced from its own 'ellor land' (other land, 3), is unlikely ever to return. Within this relationship, therefore, there is movement in opposite directions from two established locations: a forced separation that has been made in order to effect a reconciliation. Perhaps, therefore, the prosopopoeia of the poem highlights the fact that to be separated from one's kin is not only to be separated from a *treow-cynn* ('forest') of wooden buildings, but also from the family tree of human society.

These readings may not appeal to those unaccustomed to interpreting texts in this way. Although the points made here about the relationship between human beings,

124 Several comparisons between grieving women and trees are found in Norse Eddic poetry; see Bintley, 'Plant Life in the Poetic Edda'.

125 All references to *The Husband's Message* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 354–56.

126 For discussion of this damage see *The Old English Elegies*, ed. by Klinck, pp. 199–200, also plate for Folio 123A, Riddle 60 and *The Husband's Message*; also *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 694–95.

timber, and buildings certainly contribute to the models proposed in subsequent chapters, one need not accept these readings of the Exeter Book elegies to follow the argument of this book. It is necessary to approach texts like these in a different way to Bede's exegesis, for example, because they do not spell things out in quite the same way, and have no intention of doing so. Their multiple interpretative possibilities are part of their enduring appeal. Without accepting all of the points that have been made about these elegies, one can still appreciate that these vernacular poems, all of which touch on the places where humans live, and all of which refer to trees in some way, reflect a fundamental recognition of the relationship between humans, buildings, settlements, and the materiality of the built environment.

### ***Wīcs* in Old English Poetry?<sup>127</sup>**

Perhaps the most complex and controversial settlements to have emerged from the archaeological record in recent decades are the large, pre-viking settlements characterized by harbours that archaeologists and historians have referred to as *wīcs* (or *emporia*). These are thought to have begun their development as early as the sixth century, albeit on a small scale, and to have reached their fullest extent in population and size in the eighth and early ninth, before subsequently entering a process of decline, although this interpretation has been queried by Richard Hall, who suggests that this supposed decline might be more accurately interpreted as part of a process of transition.<sup>128</sup> The arguments presented here, concerning the comparative dearth of evidence for *wīcs* in Old English poetry, do not directly conflict with either interpretation. It is unsurprising, given their apparent absence from literature, that literary scholars have had nothing to say about them. The range of possible reasons for their absence, however, may have much to tell us about how their contemporaries understood them and their development. On the one hand their invisibility in the poetic record may be a consequence of the gap in time between their decline and the preservation of Old English poetry in manuscripts (if not the loss of any poetry in which they were mentioned). On the other, it may also suggest that they were accommodated within pre-existing ideas about how settlements functioned as part of contemporary socio-political structures, and that — as a consequence — no new poetic tropes or vocabulary developed to describe them.

Only four known *emporia* have been excavated archaeologically on any significant scale, namely *Hamwic* (Southampton), *Lundenwic* (London), *Eoforwic* (York), and *Ypeswic* (Ipswich).<sup>129</sup> The *raison d'être* of these *wīcs* is generally thought to have been international artisan trade; they functioned both as centres of production and as 'places of trade and exchange'.<sup>130</sup> *Wīc*, derided from Latin *vicus* (meaning 'small town'),

127 The following is based on arguments initially advanced in Bintley, 'Towns in Transition'.

128 Hall, 'The Decline of the *Wīc*?', pp. 121–33.

129 Hamerow, 'Agrarian Production and the *Emporia*', p. 219.

130 Callmer, 'Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe', p. 239; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 257.

was often used to designate 'a place known for its commercial or industrial activity',<sup>131</sup> *Emporium*, on the other hand, is a term that carries a great deal of baggage, as both Alan Morton and Ross Samson have demonstrated.<sup>132</sup> Partially for this reason, but also in the interests of retaining the term by which they were known to contemporaries, I will refer to them as *wīcs*. The position that these settlements occupied within 'local political power structures and elites' is complex, and there is no scholarly consensus about their relationship with royal power and authority.<sup>133</sup> They are difficult in other respects too; although some commentators are happy to say they possessed urban elements, what constitutes an 'urban element' is in itself problematic.<sup>134</sup> As David Hill noted, it is often difficult to determine the difference between rural and 'urban' sites in early medieval England, as it is 'only the scale, range and intensity of the activities that makes a particular site appear to be urban rather than rural'.<sup>135</sup> This, in itself, may indicate a modern preoccupation with settlement size that was less meaningful to early English contemporaries. It may be practical here to make use of Ross Samson's expression of Guy Halsall's 'minimal and workable definition' that 'towns are big settlements inhabited by lots of people'.<sup>136</sup>

The four sites excavated so far share some significant common features. The first to have been excavated fully was *Hamwic* (not *Hamwih*, as it was erroneously known for a time).<sup>137</sup> At its height, *Hamwic* is 'estimated to have contained between 2000–3000 people',<sup>138</sup> probably between the eighth and early ninth centuries, which Clarke and Ambrosiani argue to have been the 'period of true economic importance' of all four.<sup>139</sup> Founded c. 700, and thus the last of the *wīcs* to have been established,<sup>140</sup> *Hamwic* nevertheless came to encompass a densely occupied area of c. 45 hectares, marked by a 'well-defined but non-defensible boundary'.<sup>141</sup> The decline of this *wīc*, as many have noted, appears to correspond with the development of Winchester as a burh under Alfred, but the extent of this relationship is itself a matter of dispute,

131 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 139; Rumble, 'Notes on the Linguistic and Onomastic Characteristics', pp. 1–2.

132 Morton, 'Hamwic in its Context', p. 49; Samson, 'Illusory Emporia'; Pestell, 'Markets, Emporia, Wics, and "Productive" Sites', p. 557.

133 Callmer, 'Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe', pp. 240–41; see also discussion in Blinkhorn, 'Of Cabbages and Kings', pp. 10–11; O'Connor, '8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> Century Economy and Environment in York', p. 141.

134 Callmer, 'Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe', pp. 234–35.

135 Hill, 'Towns as Structures and Functioning Communities through Time', p. 212; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 122.

136 Samson, 'Illusory Emporia', p. 78, in reference to Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization*. See also discussion in Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 262.

137 See discussion in Rumble 'Saxon Southampton'; also Rumble, 'Hamtnv *alias* Hamwic (Saxon Southampton)'.<sup>137</sup>

138 Hamerow, 'Agrarian Production and the Emporia', p. 223.

139 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 32.

140 Vince, 'Saxon Urban Economies', p. 110; Maddicott, 'London and Droitchi', p. 13; Holdsworth, 'Saxon Southampton', p. 60.

141 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 35. Philip Holdsworth held this to be 37 hecatres in Holdsworth, 'Saxon Southampton', p. 335; Holdsworth, 'Saxon Southampton: A New Review', p. 60.



as is the impact of viking raiding on both the physical makeup of the *wīcs* and the trading links on which they depended.<sup>142</sup> *Gipeswic* (Ipswich), which is likely to have maintained a population of comparable size to *Hamwic* (and is well known for Ipswich Ware, 'the first post-Roman pottery type to be mass-produced using a turntable'),<sup>143</sup> may have been founded before the beginning of the seventh century, and emerging as a port of 'considerable national and international economic importance', with a legacy that arguably continues to the present day.<sup>144</sup> Like *Hamwic*, *Gipeswic* was also undefended, and covered an area of roughly 50 hectares.<sup>145</sup>

York and London were markedly different from these two sites in so far as they both developed in much closer proximity to former Roman cities; *Eoforwic* shadowed *Eboracum*, as *Lundenwic* did *Londinium*. Anglian York, *Eoforwic*, which is thought to have been the smallest of the four, with a population of c. 1000–1500,<sup>146</sup> emerged on the east bank of the River Foss, almost a kilometre from the walls of the Roman fortress, and centred on the Fishergate site.<sup>147</sup> Clarke and Ambrosiani argue that the settlement which the Great Heathen Army encountered in 867 when they arrived at York to take control of the intramural and extramural environs, was 'complex, with high-status nuclei in the former Roman fortress', as well as the 'commercial centre c. 25 hectares in extent' on the site of the *wīc*.<sup>148</sup> Russo argues that London and York are likely to have developed in broadly the same fashion, with limited high-status resettlement taking place within Roman intramural areas alongside the development of their extramural trading settlements.<sup>149</sup> *Lundenwic*, whose peak occupancy has been estimated by Hamerow at between 8,500–13,700,<sup>150</sup> and more conservatively at 6,000–7000 by Cowie and Blackmore,<sup>151</sup> occupied an area of c. 60 hectares along the Strand, between Aldwych and Trafalgar Square, stretching northwards as far as the Roman road predating New Oxford Street, and along the same modern day route that leads into High Holborn and east towards St Paul's.<sup>152</sup> Here, too, there is good evidence to indicate the beginning of urban life in the seventh century.<sup>153</sup> Over the next two centuries it developed,

142 Holdsworth, 'Saxon Southampton', p. 337; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, pp. 140–41.

143 Hamerow, 'Agrarian Production and the *Emporia*', pp. 223, 225–26.

144 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 34. John Newman perhaps more cautiously advises that Ipswich's origins should be seen as somewhere around the middle of the seventh century; see Newman, 'Wics, Trade, and the Hinterlands', p. 35. Maddicott points to the early seventh century for its origins, but recognises its 'massive expansion' only in the early eighth; see Maddicott, 'London and Droitwich', p. 13.

145 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 34.

146 Hamerow, 'Agrarian Production and the *Emporia*', p. 223.

147 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 33.

148 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, pp. 92–93.

149 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 155.

150 Hamerow, 'Agrarian Production and the *Emporia*', p. 223.

151 Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic: Excavations in Middle Saxon London*, pp. 116, 203. This volume represents the most recent and comprehensive archaeological survey of *Lundenwic* to date.

152 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, p. 81; Hall, 'The Decline of the Wic?', p. 123.

153 Vince, 'Saxon Urban Economies', p. 110.



as Tim Tatton-Brown writes, into ‘a great trading port based around the Strand foreshore *vicus* and controlled by the King’s reeve... the king being initially the Kentish king’.<sup>154</sup> The settlement at mid-Saxon London, in a seemingly more decisive fashion than the settlement at York, thus comprised two separate elements, the extramural mercantile settlement, and the walled area of the Roman town that was almost certainly home to St Paul’s cathedral, as well as potentially some buildings associated with the ruling elite.<sup>155</sup>

These, then, are the principal defining features of the *wīc* sites of early medieval England, settlements whose economic potential probably contributed significantly to the wealth of elites between c. 600–850. As Christopher Scull has argued, it is reasonable to describe these places as having ‘a proto-urban sequence’ when discussing ‘the development of the social and economic conditions which eventually sustained urban settlements.’<sup>156</sup> Given the high esteem in which Bede evidently held London as an *emporium*, one might expect Old English vernacular texts to say something about them.<sup>157</sup> However, references to *wīcs* are far from abundant, and there is no familiar topos of bustling marketplaces and crowded foreshores, and no descriptions of traders and craft workers living cheek by jowl in densely packed yet relatively undefended settlements. Once again, the evidence is more challenging and obscure. Although there are plenty of *wīc*-derived terms in Old English poetry, most are not particularly useful when it comes to finding the *wīcs* described above, as the term can denote a variety of places that may or may not include dwellings.<sup>158</sup> Many instances almost certainly refer to some kind of dwelling place or group of dwellings, but offer no further clue as to the type of settlement they describe.<sup>159</sup> Whilst some do refer to an identifiable town or city, it is mostly only in vague terms, without apparently meaning anything more than ‘place’.<sup>160</sup>

There are very few examples in Old English poetry of *wīcs* which suggest a trading port where ships might be moored after a sea voyage. One of these appears in one of the few passages in the *Maxims* of the Exeter Book where a narrative flares briefly into life, in which a sailor returns home in his ship:

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- 154 Tatton-Brown, ‘The Topography of Anglo-Saxon London’, p. 25; also Keene, ‘London in the Early Middle Ages’; Keene, ‘London from the Post-Roman Period to 1300’.
- 155 Cowie and Whytehead, ‘Lundenwic’, p. 706. see also further discussion in Schofield, ‘Saxon and Medieval Parish Churches in the City of London’, p. 33; Keene, ‘London in the Early Middle Ages’, pp. 9–21; Biddle, ‘A City in Transition’; Cowie, ‘Mercian London’, pp. 194–209; Maddicott, ‘London and Droitwich’, pp. 8–9.
- 156 Scull, ‘Urban Centres in Pre-Viking England?’, p. 291.
- 157 See *HE* II. 3 (pp. 142–43), in which Bede describes the city of London as the metropolis of the East Saxons.
- 158 For example, *Wife’s Lament* (32); a place outside of Eden (*Genesis* 928) and similarly abstracted from God for an exiled Cain (*Genesis* 1051); Israelite encampments (*Exodus* 87, 133, 200); the Phoenix’s perch (*Phoenix* 448).
- 159 Heaven (*Genesis* 27; *Phoenix* 611); Abraham’s home (*Genesis* 1721); Guthlac’s barrow and its environs (*Guthlac A* 284, 702; *Guthlac B* 894); the dwellings of Guthlac’s enemies (*Guthlac A* 298).
- 160 Bethlehem (*Genesis* 1877); Grendel’s mere (*Beowulf* 125, 821, 1612); Matthew’s and subsequently Andrew’s prison in Mermedonia (*Andreas* 131, 1310).

Scip sceal genægled, scyld gebunden,  
 leoht linden bord, leof wilcuma  
 Frysan wife, þonne flota stondeð —  
 biþ his ceol cumen ond hyre ceorl to ham,  
 agen ætgeofa, ond heo hine in laðað,  
 wæsced his warig hrægl ond him syleþ wæde niwe,  
 liþ him on londe þæs his lufu bæded.

[The ship must be nailed, the shield bound, the light linden board, and the welcome-home Frisian loved by his wife, when his ship is at rest — his keel has returned, and her husband is home, her own breadwinner, and she leads him in, washes his dirty clothing, and gives him clean garments, sailing with him on land as his desire bids.]

(*Maxims I(B)* 23–29)

There is little to suggest a specific location, save some kind of place where the ship 'stands'.<sup>161</sup> The seafarer's wife goes to meet him, and there is some implication that, with the boards of their partnership having held tight, neither party can be accused of any infidelity. She leads him, subsequently, to 'board' her sexually. This is followed by some cautionary lines on the necessary fidelity of women whose lot it is to mourn their men until they see them safe and sound once again, assuming they have not drowned at sea (30–36). Male fidelity is not mentioned. Assuming that the seafarer survives the journey:

Ceapeadig mon cyningwic þonne  
 leodon cypeþ, þonne liþan cymeð;  
 wudu ond wæteres nyttað, þonne him biþ wic alyfed,  
 mete bygeþ, gif he maran þearf, ærþon he to meþe weorþe.

[A man rich in goods then purchases for his people a royal *wic* when his ship comes in; he has made use of wood and water, then a *wic* is granted to him, and food to purchase, if he has need of more, lest he become too weary.]

(*Maxims I(B)* 37–40)<sup>162</sup>

This is a revealing example of what it means for a man to own goods, and directly connects the buying and selling of these goods with the maintenance of a household and family. It is accompanied by terms including *ceap* and *wic* that are well known in settlements, and appears in the context of lines that also refer to the mooring of a ship. They do not, unfortunately, describe the setting in which this is taking place — it seems that no further explanation is required, because the listener's understanding is assumed.

161 In keeping with the possible makeup and administration of the port at London (by way of illustration), as discussed in Milne and Goodburn, 'The Early Medieval Port of London'; similar shorefronts are envisaged in Hinton, 'The Large Towns', p. 220.

162 See discussion of these lines 37–38 in *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 559–60.

*Cyning-wic* and *ceap-eadig* can be read as one or two words here, and translated variously. If, as in the above translation, one treats these compounds as *ceapeadig* and *cyningwic*, the *cyning* element could indicate that ‘a man rich in goods then purchases for his people a kingly *wīc*’.<sup>163</sup> In this case, *cyning* is used in a more general sense to suggest a princely or high-status dwelling place, perhaps with a mercantile element. However, as the Dictionary of Old English indicates, *cyning-* most often appears in compounds that refer specifically to kings, their rights, duties, and possession.<sup>164</sup> Law codes and legal documents refer to the *cyning-æþe* (king’s oath, Laws of Ine 54), *cyning-feorm* (royal provisions/tax, S218), and the *cyning-ric*e (kingdom, S1154) of Edward the Confessor, whilst the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* refers to the *cyning-cynn* (‘royal family’) on several occasions. In poetry, *cyning-dōm* (royal authority, *Daniel* 3, 567, 678) refers to the sovereignty of the Israelites, and the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; *cyning-wuldor* (‘glorious king’, *Beowulf* 665) to Hrothgar (or God); and *cyning-geniþla* (‘royal enemy’, *Elene* 609) to Judas, in his opposition to Helena and Constantine.<sup>165</sup> *Cyning-* compounds also appear in three glosses on Latin texts referring to a gaming piece (*cyning-stan*), royal apparel (*cyning-gyrela*), and a royal dish (*cyning-gereorde*), and elsewhere as part of the name of a plant (*cyninges-wyrt*). Only once is it used in a more general sense as *cyning-beald* (‘bold as a king’, *Beowulf* 1634) to describe the mood of the Geats returning from the mere after the defeat of Grendel’s mother, perhaps anticipating Beowulf’s rise to royal power.

*Cyningwic* could well be used to indicate an impressive *wīc* in slightly abstracted terms, as ‘fit for a king’. However, the evidence from both legal and poetic contexts suggests a predominantly formal use of the word, in contexts indicating regulation, hierarchy, and control. This could lend weight to Scull’s view that these settlements operated as part of systems within which ‘the social organization of production and exchange, like that of lordship and jurisdiction, was articulated through a rural structure of multiple or complex estates and its associated settlement hierarchy’.<sup>166</sup> Building on the earlier view that the development of these places was undertaken by kings, and more recent suggestions that merchants had a more active role to play in their success, Blair has argued that the flourishing of the *emporia* (c. 670–700) during the same period as the ‘great monastic sites’ is likely to indicate ‘the formation of these places in the cosmopolitan cultural milieus that leading ecclesiastics shared with kings’.<sup>167</sup> Although their relative absence from these places from the literary record contributes little by way of direct evidence, *Maxims I* suggests that whatever the nature of the interconnections between royal and ecclesiastical authority may

163 *cyning-wīc*; Dictionary of Old English: A to I.

164 The examples in this paragraph are taken from the Dictionary of Old English under the headwords indicated.

165 References to *Elene* from *Cynewulf’s ‘Elene’*, ed. by Gradon.

166 Scull, ‘Urban Centres in Pre-Viking England?’, pp. 292–93 (also pp. 285–88).

167 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 173 (and wider discussion pp. 165–74). On the evidence of coinage from *Lundenwic*, see discussion in Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, pp. 95–102.

have been, there was a clear sense of the land-purchasing power of merchants, and the broader dominion of kings.

There are various possible reasons why the *wīcs* made very little impact on Old English poetry, though some combination of the following factors seems most likely. Firstly, if there were any more fully developed representations of *wīcs* in Old English poetry, then the poems containing them may simply have been lost. Secondly, that if they were represented in poetry, such works may not have survived because of the shift in attention away from the *wīcs* in the centuries before this poetry was written down. Thirdly, they may not have been thought worthy of representation, and seen as mundane and functional places of commerce with no contemporary John Betjeman to yearn for their destruction. This would also be in keeping with the broader omission of economic realities from vernacular literature, which seldom has much to say about wealth beyond abstractions or poetic conventions. Twisted gold is commonplace; coinage is not. Finally, it is possible that no distinct tradition representing these places ever emerged, because the settlements themselves did not appear or disappear at a rate which made them seem suddenly, or markedly, different from their predecessors.<sup>168</sup> It may have been there was nothing all that special about *wīcs* for the people who lived in them — nothing more than the economic possibilities that they offered for personal advancement, and the dubious blessing of living side by side with a high concentration of people in less than sanitary conditions.<sup>169</sup> This would contribute to the view that they appeared, as a phenomenon, in parallel with other contemporary innovations, and were understood as elements in an evolving settlement landscape governed by existing conceptions of secular and ecclesiastical power. It is worth bearing in mind that the pace of change may also have been a significant factor in this, and that the absence of any violent rupture (of the kind discussed in the next chapter) meant that even in instances where substantial planned development may have taken place, it was not necessarily registered as being different from contemporary developments elsewhere.<sup>170</sup>

## Burhs in Middle-Saxon England

One notable characteristic of the *wīcs* is their lack of physical defences, a feature which may have contributed to their decline during the so-called Viking Age.<sup>171</sup> In this respect they were distinct from the sort of sites combining trade and fortification that were established from the ninth century onwards, and which are commonly referred to as the 'Alfredian' burhs. Though there were burhs before Alfred, they were not necessarily the kind referred to in the Burghal Hidage document, and are not

<sup>168</sup> Hinton, 'Metalwork and the Emporia', p. 30.

<sup>169</sup> See discussion in Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, pp. 82–83.

<sup>170</sup> Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 171–72.

<sup>171</sup> Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 16. Richard Hall considers the decline of *wīc* sites to have been the result of a number of longer term factors, see Hall, 'The Decline of the *Wīc*?', p. 121.

thought to have been part of the same kind of system. The word *burh* itself, which has cognates in all Germanic languages, stems from the Old English verb ‘*beorgan*’ (to defend), though the term does not seem to indicate one particular set of features, as John Baker has demonstrated, but rather the potential of a site for defence.<sup>172</sup> In place names, notably, the semantic range is sufficiently broad ‘to prevent confident assertion that the principal function of sites was military or defensive.’<sup>173</sup> It is also important to note, therefore, that whilst the term *burh* may indicate a stronghold of some kind, it need not indicate a place of settlement.<sup>174</sup> David Hill argued that the *burhs* of the Alfredian period had first developed in mid-Saxon Mercia, where by the reign of Offa (757–796), successor to Æthelbald (716–757) and the short-lived Beornred, there is charter evidence for the building and maintenance of fortress-works, as well as archaeological evidence for ‘at least two large defended settlements, a minimum of four forts, a possible palace site at Kingsbury by Saint Albans, and a complex system of frontier defences.’<sup>175</sup> Offa’s Dyke alone, the construction of which has been put ‘between 784 and 796’, is a good indicator of the influence that the Mercian aristocracy could exert, with this vast physical *limes* having required the mobilization of numbers at which we can perhaps only guess.<sup>176</sup>

The form taken by a number of *burh* place names in early English sources, as Russo argues, suggests that they had been ‘private strongholds founded by or belonging to locally important leaders.’<sup>177</sup> Eight such *burhs* were under the control of Offa by the mid-eighth century.<sup>178</sup> Stuart Brookes and John Baker’s recent interdisciplinary investigation of the burghal system and its origins has affirmed the existence of late eighth- and early ninth-century strongholds in Mercia, which have been identified archaeologically at Tamworth, Hereford, and Winchcombe.<sup>179</sup> Gareth Williams, who has argued against seeing this system as a predecessor of the Alfredian *burhs*, has done so on the basis that excavations of the proposed Offan *burhs* ‘provide a very limited corroboration to contribute to fortification in Mercia.’<sup>180</sup> As Baker and Brookes agree, an important difference between these and the later Alfredian *burhs*, is that the former are likely to have been ‘isolated strongholds’, rather than places

172 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 95–103; see also Baker, ‘What Makes a Stronghold?’; Draper, ‘*Burh* Enclosures in Anglo-Saxon Settlements’; Draper, ‘The Significance of Old English *Burh*’; Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 134.

173 Baker, ‘What Makes a Stronghold?’, p. 328.

174 Draper, ‘The Significance of Old English *Burh*’, pp. 241–42, 49; Gardiner, ‘Late-Saxon Settlements’, p. 200; Hall, ‘*Burhs* and Boroughs’, pp. 601–02.

175 Hill, ‘The Origin of Alfred’s Urban Policies’, p. 221. This same sequence is supported in Haslam, ‘Market and Fortress in England in the Reign of Offa’, p. 76; Bassett, ‘The Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon Defences of West Mercian Towns’, pp. 181–82. On eighth-century charter commitments see also Nelson, *Rulers and Ruling Families*, pp. 128–29.

176 Hill and Worthington, *Offa’s Dyke*, pp. 113–28; Loveluck and Laing, ‘Britons and Anglo-Saxons’, p. 547; Campbell, ‘Historical Sources and Archaeology’, p. 954.

177 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 198.

178 Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 199.

179 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 49 (and discussion pp. 49–63).

180 Williams, ‘Military Obligations and Mercian Supremacy in the Eighth Century’, p. 104.

that formed part of a sophisticated network of military defence.<sup>181</sup> Concerning their function in the settlement landscape, Jeremy Haslam has suggested that:

... the intra-mural space was not necessarily the most important locus for settlement [...] the defended area was but one element in a more loosely defined settlement pattern whose principal focus, in terms of human movement and activity, and perhaps even settlement, was probably extra-mural. The intra-mural area is likely to have been given over to specialised activities associated with centralised administrative and/or ecclesiastical functions, and/or as a refuge.<sup>182</sup>

These were not the same sorts of places, Hill argued, as Alfred's 'multi-functional *burhs*, fortified places with, in some cases, planned layouts and paved roads', or aspirations to become trade centres, and were not part of a planned network of in-depth defence.<sup>183</sup> John Blair, however, has suggested that these Mercian innovations in the eighth century provided the blueprint from which 'in all likelihood, other kingdoms borrowed'.<sup>184</sup> Alongside the development of infrastructure projects including earthworks and bridges, he proposes a 'parallel Mercian system' that was 'older, more extensive [...] and more complex' than the Alfredian system, and that this, 'learned by Alfred's forebears from their more powerful neighbours and in-laws' was subsequently 'adopted and extended' so successfully 'that history has assimilated them to the "West Saxon" achievement'.<sup>185</sup> This argument is advanced using case studies of eight *burh-tūnas* in Mercia that 'display consistent and recurrent patterns of control, communication, and defence', alongside examples of parallel early arrangements in Wessex and Northumbria.<sup>186</sup> Blair's case for a proto-burghal system that was absorbed into the Alfredian mythos makes compelling use of the evidence from the wider landscape, and whether or not one accepts the arrangements he describes as an immediate predecessor to the late-ninth/tenth-century burghal system, it is clear that these defensible strongholds were a feature of the landscape before the ninth century.

Attempting to discern patterns amongst the use of *burh*-derived terms in Old English poetry is just as problematic as the search for *wīcs*.<sup>187</sup> It is difficult to identify features which indicate that burhs of a certain type existed at any particular point in time, and were not simply imagined, or contrived, in order to illustrate strongholds that existed outside of early medieval England. Inhabitants of lowland Britain were

181 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 50. Jeremy Haslam lists seven potential eighth-century Mercian *burhs* that may have been located on Roman sites, including Cambridge, Godmanchester, Leicester, Lincoln, London, Worcester, and Canterbury. *Burhs* on non-Roman sites may have included Bedford, Hereford, Nottingham, Northampton, Oxford, Stamford, Tamworth, Winchcombe, and perhaps also Norwich; see Haslam, 'Market and Fortress', pp. 81–83.

182 Haslam, 'Market and Fortress', pp. 87–88. Haslam suggests that his model of Offan burghal and market policy is most likely to have been implemented in the 780s (p. 90).

183 Hill, 'The Eighth-Century Urban Landscape', p. 97.

184 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 179.

185 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 201, 231.

186 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 201–30 (at 201).

187 Some two hundred entries are given in Bessinger, *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, pp. 154–55.



no strangers to fortified Roman settlements, as we have already seen. Thus, on the one hand, the description of burhs in their poetry is likely to have been reflective of their experience of walled Roman settlements, as in the case of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel* (when concerning events in the Near East), in other poems set in the world of 'Antiquity' such as *Elene*, *Andreas*, *Juliana*, or *Judith*, or in any one of the many instances where heaven appears as a walled bastion.<sup>188</sup> On the other, there remain a few references to burhs in Old English poetry which do not seem to depict Roman fortifications. These representations may be more useful in helping us understand what else the term may have meant to contemporary poets and their audiences, especially taking into consideration Simon Draper's demonstration that the term burh may have referred to enclosures that were ditched, fenced, or hedged, rather than walled.<sup>189</sup>

There are numerous uses of the term in *Beowulf* which — leaving the poet's disregard for anachronism aside — seem intended to evoke the image of a hall and its surrounding buildings, perhaps surrounded by a ditch or palisade (though none of these features is ever mentioned). Breca returns to just such a place after his swimming match with Beowulf, to his *burh ond beagas* ('stronghold and wealth' 523). The last survivor, before sealing up the mound of treasure, and lamenting that *bealocwealm hafað fela feorhcynna forð onsended* ('baleful death has sent forth many of the race of men' 2265–66), describes something similar when he laments that *ne se swifta mearh burhstede beateð* ('the swift horse does not gallop through the place of the stronghold', 2264–65). Guthlac may offer an exception here, as the poet writes that the saint's works became *breme æfter burgum geond Bryten innan* ('famous throughout the strongholds of Britain' Guthlac B 65). However, as this use of burh is ambiguous, and Guthlac's life straddles the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth, it is difficult to know what the poet intended; *burgum* (942) is used throughout the poem in a non-specific sense to indicate the 'places of refuge' in the fens where Guthlac defended himself through faith.<sup>190</sup> It is plain enough that all of these burhs are to be understood in these terms, primarily as places of refuge and security, whatever their exact form and function. The same sense is expressed by the seafarer in the eponymous Exeter Book elegy, when he complains that:

Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn  
gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,  
wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft  
in brimlade bidan sceolde.

188 These representations and their inclusion in manuscripts circling around the turn of the first millennium will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5, pp. 158–75.

189 Draper, 'The Significance of Old English *Burh*', p. 249.

190 See also *burgsalu* and *burgsalo* ('holy house' Guthlac B 466, 513), *burgstede* ('place of refuge' 499), and *burgum* ('place of refuge' Guthlac B 549), all of which use the same terminology to describe Guthlac's fen-refuge.



[Therefore he little believes, who has experienced the joys of life in towns, but few dangerous journeys, proud and wine-flushed, how I have often, weary, had to remain on the sea-path.]

(*The Seafarer* 27–30)

In saying this, *The Seafarer* is not making a point about any one type of settlement, but rather complaining about the difference between those who dwell on land, in places of protection, and those who risk their lives in undertainty upon the open seas. The most useful insight that the term *burh* may offer, when considered in the contexts of Old English poetry, is that it was not applied to settlements of any particular kind, or of any particular size. It might be used to describe a variety of places of strength or defence, and include places as diverse as the strongholds to which Breca returned after the swimming match with Beowulf, or the unforgiving landscape of Guthlac's refuge in the fens. Where then did the defensive potential of these places lie? Perhaps principally in the strength of their defenders.

One's first impression of the evidence for *wīcs* (or *emporia*) and pre-Alfredian *burh* sites in the Old English literary corpus is that, because there is very little of it, and what there is may not always be terribly convincing, it does not contribute significantly to our understanding of how they were seen by contemporaries. Were it not for the revelations of archaeology, in conjunction with place names and documentary sources, there would be very little evidence that they had ever existed, and little indication that they had much impact on the landscape and development of proto-urban settlements and strongholds before the latter half of the ninth century. What can be found in literary texts, illuminated by the material evidence, is not the wholesale absence of these places, but rather the fainter shadows of buildings, settlements, and places of refuge. These may not have dominated the imagination, and some seem to have faded from memory as they were replaced by places of greater importance to elite ideology, but what they formed, importantly, was part of the backdrop of shared experience over generations: of timber buildings; of places that came and went with the ebb and flow of fortunes, as dependent upon the tides of commerce and conflict as they were upon the waters themselves; and of strongholds that had already come to occupy a position in vernacular poetry of both security and power.

## Conclusion

The earliest examples of active re-engagement with Roman stone architecture in early medieval England were primarily a consequence of ecclesiastical intervention. It was the Church, leading the aristocracy, which drove the conscious reuse and appropriation of this Roman fabric by elites. Secular conceptions of lordship, people, land, and wealth, remained tightly clustered around the symbolism of the hall, as they had likely been in the period before the arrival of Roman missionaries, and as they would continue to do so until the Conquest. This is understandable, given that representations of the cosmos as a roofed hall were common in Old English literature, and are reflected accordingly in the writings of Bede, whose own conception of the

divinely established hierarchy of secular and ecclesiastical order reflects a similar framework, recognizing a balance between lay people and the clergy that was integral to both the development and maintenance of England's kingdoms and its Church. Individuals may have seen themselves as far more closely related to their settlements than has previously been recognized, and works of the period draw attention to both the physical relationship between people and building materials, and the metaphorical relationship between the architecture of buildings, society, and the Church.

This chapter has raised questions about why the burh and *wīc* sites known to us from the archaeology and other documentary sources of the period are underrepresented in contemporary literature, given what we know about their importance from the archaeological record and other sources. The lack of literary evidence for these kinds of settlements and strongholds may well be a result of the loss of poetry that described them. When we do glimpse these places the emphasis is on the people who inhabit them rather than the settlements themselves. Returning to David Hill's observation that 'there is little to distinguish between an Early Medieval town site and a rural one', it may have been the case that contemporaries did not think of these *wīcs* as being substantially different from other settlement types, save for the fact that they were bigger and more densely occupied.<sup>191</sup> Whether or not political elites steered their development, or were rather more 'passive profiteers', their emergence may have presented no particular challenge to conceptions of hierarchy.<sup>192</sup> This may be one of several reasons why the *wīcs* received no substantial treatment in Old English poetry. Equally, they may have emerged at too slow a pace, or in a form insufficiently distinct from pre-existing settlements, to have prompted any literary response.

The same may also have been true of burhs at this time, whatever form they may have taken, and whatever sort of organized system of construction and maintenance had (or had not yet) come into being. Burhs of the kind found in the archaeological record make few appearances in Old English literature. Whilst defensible mid-Saxon burhs are attested in place names and archaeology, Old English literature reveals more than a few uses of this word which may not imply much more than clusters of buildings protected by armed defenders. Although certain developments had taken place in the makeup of large settlements and central places before the beginning of the Viking Age, these may not have required the development of a new symbolic or literary vocabulary. This, as the next chapter argues, is what began to happen in the ninth century, when viking invasion and settlement prompted fundamental changes to the way that urban settlements were conceptualized and represented in vernacular texts.

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191 Hill, 'Towns as Structures and Functioning Communities through Time', p. 212.

192 Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 52–54; see also discussion in Callmer, 'Urbanisation in Northern and Eastern Europe', pp. 240–41; Saunders, 'Early Mediaeval Emporia and the Tributary Social Function', pp. 7–8; Astill, 'Overview: Trade, Exchanges, and Urbanization', p. 510; Pestell, 'Markets, Emporia, Wics, and "Productive" Sites', p. 573.

## Settlements, Strongholds, and the Alfredian Reinvention

This chapter argues that the events of the ninth century prompted significant changes to the way in which settlements and strongholds were conceptualized and represented, and that these changes were consciously directed by elites. Chapter 2 considered the representation of ruinous Roman towns as the work of giants. These large areas of intramural space, demarcated by stone walls, underwent a severe decline in occupation following the end of Roman rule in Britain, and were not — in many cases — to display significant signs of reuse and resettlement until the ninth and tenth centuries. Although many were not entirely deserted throughout the intervening period, occupation was limited, and redevelopment served the needs of relatively small communities. Before the ninth century, the symbolic use of intramural space was largely restricted to the Church and social elites. During the reigns of Alfred and his successors, however, these places underwent a symbolic metamorphosis through which they shed the burdens of decay and desolation they had borne in popular consciousness and were re-presented as places for community and prosperity. This accompanied the beginnings of a shift in the occupation of strongholds and settlements that took place, in many cases, as a result of pressures on northern and eastern England as a consequence of viking invasion and settlement. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many of these developments in fact had precedents in the pre-Alfredian period and may have owed a considerable debt to eighth-century Mercian innovation. This chapter will discuss the ways in which texts from this period served, in parallel to the functional aspects of the burghal system, to create an impression of novelty and invention that suited the political ambitions of Wessex, and still contribute significantly to our sense of this late ninth-century shift as a pivotal moment in the creation of the late-Saxon settlement landscape.

### Reclaiming the Urban Landscape in *Andreas*

The work that may best represent this conceptual shift is the *Andreas* poem of the Vercelli Book, which was briefly discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to the Roman inheritance of Mermedonia.<sup>1</sup> The poem describes St Andrew's journey to this town

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is a development of arguments originally put forward in Bintley, 'Demythologising Urban Landscapes'; see also more recent discussion in Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 104–11; and *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley. The sources and analogues of *Andreas* are discussed

and stronghold, where he is sent by God to rescue St Matthew from the clutches of the Mermedonians, an anthropophagic people living under the influence of Satan. After liberating Matthew and his fellow captives from bondage, Andrew reveals his identity and is incarcerated and tortured. After undergoing severe torments at the hands of his captors Andrew appeals to God's mercy from his prison cell, whereupon a torrent of water gushes forth from a pillar, engulfing Mermedonia, and symbolically baptizing its inhabitants, whose fear of death ensures their hasty conversion.

If the Vercelli Book provides a *terminus ante quem* of c. 975, then the poet's apparent references to *Beowulf* offer a far less exact eighth-century *terminus post quem*. Although the poem displays a number of features which suggest a ninth-century date (even before considering its ideological interests), it is not essential for *Andreas* to have been composed at this time for its message to have been especially relevant during this period.<sup>2</sup> If it predates the Viking Age, it is nevertheless reflective of attitudes towards intramural settlements that were especially relevant in the late ninth century, and may have been of similar interest to the Vercelli Book's tenth-century compilers. This would also have been true if the poem was written in the tenth century, when a number of walled Roman settlements (like Chester and Gloucester) were undergoing steps towards urban regeneration, albeit in some cases with limited success.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that this process, which had begun with the return of the Church in the seventh century, may have contributed to the popularity of *Andreas* legends in early medieval England noted by Tom Shippey.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most significant aspects of the *Andreas* poet's adaptation of the source material, as Hugh Magennis has noted, is the 'development of place and setting' achieved through free exploitation of 'features derived from the vernacular poetic traditions', which contributes an 'emotive dimension' to places like Mermedonia that is largely absent from the poem's Latin and Greek analogues.<sup>5</sup> This is apparent from the very beginning of the poem, in which Mermedonia emerges only gradually, obscured from clear sight, like many of the most effective monstrosities in fiction. St Matthew is the first of the apostles to be sent there, on a proselytizing mission:

Wæs hira Matheus sum,  
se mid Iudeum ongan godspell ærest  
wordum writan wundorcræfte.  
þam halig god hlyt geteode  
ut on þæt igland þær ænig þa git  
ellþeodigra eðles ne mihte  
blædes brucan; oft him bonena hand  
on herefelda hearde gesceode.

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earlier in this volume, pp. 52–53.

<sup>2</sup> *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley.

<sup>3</sup> See Bintley, 'The Translation of St Oswald's Relics'.

<sup>4</sup> Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 173.

[One of them was Matthew, who was the first among Jews to begin to write the Gospel in words with wondrous skill. For him did holy God fashion the lot out to that land over water where no man from homeland of foreigners could yet enjoy happiness: him often the hands of slayers on the field of plunder cruelly harmed.]

(*Andreas* 11–18)

In this opening description, Mermedonia is described as an *igland*, a word that has attracted a great deal of commentary, and which many are keen to translate as ‘island.’ Others, including myself and Richard North, have suggested that it is more likely to indicate a land *beyond* the water, or *beside* the water, than a land encircled by water.<sup>6</sup> It is certainly never circumnavigated in the poem. Equally intriguing is the description of Mermedonia as a *herefeld* (10, 18) twice in the space of twenty lines, defining it as a battlefield for spiritual warfare (the kind of combat to which the apostles are dispatched in line 10) even before the poet describes the horrors inflicted on the Mermedonians’ victims.<sup>7</sup>

In this and many other respects, Mermedonia is blessed with none of the virtues that we would expect or hope for from a place of community or refuge. Such is the bloodthirsty nature of the Mermedonians, that the liminal places where one would expect battles to be fought have become their central places. In this respect they share their fate with the people of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*, or the displaced Britons of Gildas and Bede. The poet’s description of Mermedonia continues in much the same vein, telling us that:

Eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden,  
feondes facne, folcstede gumena,  
hæleda eðel. Næs þær hlafes wist  
werum on þam wonge, ne wæteres drync  
to bruconne, ah hie blod ond fel,  
fira flæscho-man, feorrancumenra,  
ðegon geond þa þeode. Swelc wæs þeaw hira  
þæt hie æghwylcne ellðeodigra  
dydan him to mose meteþearfendum,  
þara þe þæt ealand utan sohte.

[All bound in murder was that border country, with devil’s crime, that men’s habitation, homeland of heroes; it was not loaf food there nor drink of water that men in that country had for their use, but blood and skin, flesh of men come from far, on which they in that nation dined. Such was their custom, that each man from a nation of foreigners did they make, when needing food, into meat, of those who sought that land by water from abroad.]

(*Andreas* 19–28)

6 Brooks, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, p. 152; *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley.

7 See discussion in Williams, “For the Sake of Bravado in the Wilderness”.

Once again, Mermedonia is described as an *ealand*, another ‘land beyond/beside the water’, but also as a moral no-man’s land, surrounded not by water but *morðre bewunden, feondes facne* (‘bound in murder, with devil’s crime’ 19–20). The juxtaposition between this and the formulaic description of Mermedonia as a *folcstede gumena, hæleða eðel* (‘men’s habitation, homeland of warriors’ 20–21) seems heavily laden with irony, given that Old English poetry does not often use these terms to describe places where visitors are blinded, drugged, and eaten. The Mermedonians and their town are presented as an inversion of all that is good and civilised, whilst still bearing recognisable hallmarks of human society and order, in much the same way that Grendel’s anti-hall contains elements also found in Heorot, such as weapons and a fire.<sup>8</sup> Bearing this in mind may account for the lack of occupied buildings mentioned in *Andreas* before the baptismal flood; the Mermedonians, in their current state, do not seem to be capable of leading a civilised existence.<sup>9</sup>

Matthew’s arrival in Mermedonia is intrusive enough to attract the immediate attention of its inhabitants, who appear in the rank and file of a *militia Diaboli* opposing the warriors of God, as Ivan Herbison has noted.<sup>10</sup> Here too, are the first signs of Mermedonia’s urban fabric up close:

Ða wæs Matheus to þære mæran byrig  
cumen in þa ceastre. þær wæs cirm micel  
geond Mermedonia, manfulra hloð,  
fordenera gedræg, syþþan deofles þegnas  
geascodon æðelings sið.

[Now Matthew making for that famous town had come into the city. There was great outcry through Mermedonia, the gang of the wicked, the mob of the damned, when the devil’s thanes found out about the prince’s mission.]

(*Andreas* 40–44)

Whilst the emphasis here is very much upon the thronging mass of Mermedonians, there is also a general impression of the surrounding settlement, vague though it may be. Firstly, it houses a population sizeable enough for news of Matthew’s arrival to circulate *geond* it, acting as a summons to battle. Secondly, it is a *ceastre*, a term that for contemporary audiences would directly connect it with the many walled towns and forts in their landscape.<sup>11</sup> More than this, it is described as a *mæran byrig* here (line 40) and elsewhere, once by the sailors who transport Andrew (line 287) and once by God (line 973). Though this phrase can be translated as ‘famous fortress’, ‘infamous fortress’ would probably be more appropriate, given that it is referred to as a *hæðnan burg* (‘heathen stronghold’ 111) elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> However, it possesses the potential to

8 Hume, ‘The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry’, p. 68.

9 Hume, ‘The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry’, p. 72.

10 Herbison, ‘Generic Adaptation in *Andreas*’, p. 192.

11 Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 149.

12 Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 660.

shed these negative associations, as God makes clear to Andrew when he first sends him out to rescue Matthew, warning him of the Mermedonians' anthropophagy (174–88), but also addressing Mermedonia's potential for reclamation in his name:

Nis þæt uneaðe eallwealdan gode  
to gefremmanne on foldwege,  
ðæt sio ceaster hider on þas cneorisse  
under swegles gang asetod wyrðe,  
breogostol breme, mid þam burgwarum,  
gif hit worde becwið wuldres agend.

[It is not beyond the ease of omnipotent God to bring it to pass in earthly parts that the city right here in this country beneath sun's course be settled down, that famed principality with citizens in it, if the Owner of glory says the word.]

(*Andreas* 205–10)

Thus, despite the current state of misery in which the town and its inhabitants eke out their wretched existence, repentance from sin offers the possibility of redemption, and the potential for Mermedonia to be returned to a state of grace.<sup>13</sup>

After a lengthy discussion with Jesus in the ship that transports him to Mermedonia, Andrew falls into a deep sleep during which he is ferried to the town gates by angelic stewards, who then drift out of the narrative and back up to the heavens.

...leton þone halgan be herestræte  
swefan on sybbe under swegles hleo,  
bliðne bidan burhwealle neh,  
his niðhetum, nihtlangne fyrst,  
oðþæt dryhten forlet dægandelle  
scire scinan. Scedu sweðerodon,  
wonn under wolcnum; þa com wederes blæst,  
hador heofonleoma, ofer hofu blican.

[...they left the saint by army highway slumbering in fellowship below firmament's shelter, contentedly near town's walls awaiting for night-long duration his deadly oppressors, until the Lord allowed the candle of day brightly to shine. The shadows retreated, pale beneath clouds; then sky-blast came, heaven's radiant gleam glancing over buildings.]

(*Andreas* 831–38)

The kind of *herestræte* (literally 'army-path') that leads to the gates of Mermedonia was a common feature in the contemporary landscape, and the military function of these roads must have been especially obvious when they led to centres of power

13 David Hamilton, on this count, notes the 'frequent assertion that Mermedonia is a joyless land', in much the same manner of descriptions of Hell in *Genesis* and *Christ and Satan*. See Hamilton, 'The Diet and Digestion of Allegory', p. 148; also further discussion in Bintley, 'Where the Wild Things Are'.



like walled towns and strongholds.<sup>14</sup> This term also reinforces the impression that Andrew is on his way to wage war in Mermedonia (described earlier as a *herefeld* [‘battlefield’ 10, 18]), in the role of *miles Christi*.<sup>15</sup> Following the road up to the city, the reader halts in their tracks before the *burhweall*, where Andrew has been left sleeping. The narrator pauses beside him for a moment, thinking on the Mermedonians on the other side of the town’s fortifications, *his niðhetum* (‘his hostile enemies’) who are themselves presumably slumbering in its shadows as the sun rises, scattering clouds and darkness. At this point Andrew awakens, looking upon the city for the first time:

Onwoc þa wiges heard, wang sceawode  
fore burggeatum; beorgas steape,  
hleodū hlifodon, ymbe harne stan  
tigelfagan trafu, torras stodon,  
windige weallas.

[Then the man hardened by battle awoke, and saw the lie of the land before the town’s gates; steep mountains, cliffsides rose up, around the hoary rock stood shacks adorned with tiles, towers, windswept walls.]

(*Andreas* 839–43)

The majority of the urban features described, including town gates, stone ramparts, tiled rooves, towers, and wind-blown walls, belong to the same stock of ruined structures that we have already seen in *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*.<sup>16</sup> There is more to these descriptions than superficial neutrality, as Garner agrees.<sup>17</sup> The poet uses formulaic motifs here and elsewhere, such as *harne stan* (*The Ruin* 43; *Beowulf* 887, 1415, 2553, 2744), but does this to invoke a series of associations with the *enta geweorc* known elsewhere in Old English poetry. These walls, and this city, belong to the world of things that are dead and buried. Beyond this, it is also worth noting that the emphasis here is on the fortifications and exterior of Mermedonia — there is no mention of anything approaching the domestic. This identifies it as a place of segregation rather than inclusion; it is for keeping people out rather than welcoming them in.

Mermedonia’s urban fabric is mostly absent from this point onwards. The only building that is the focus of any attention is the jail in which Matthew and various other prisoners are confined, which becomes the focal point of the city as a whole, in

14 Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 19. A classic study remains Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*.

15 Hill, ‘The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry’, p. 71. see also Biggs, ‘The Passion of Andreas’; Herbison, ‘Generic Adaptation in *Andreas*’, p. 186.

16 I do not agree that this city would ‘have seemed fantastic to Anglo-Saxons’, ‘marvellous’, or that it was a place of ‘architectural wonders’; places of this kind were ubiquitous in their own landscape. Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 157–58.

17 Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, p. 107.

the same way that Heorot acts as a focal point in the first two thirds of *Beowulf*.<sup>18</sup> This lock-up is an entirely fitting metaphor for Mermedonia, which languishes in a state of spiritual bondage awaiting a Christian harrowing. After exchanging words with Jesus, who appears to him in the form of a boy (line 912) and promises that his soul will not be harmed, Andrew is commanded to go into *þa ceastre... under burglocan, þær þin broðor is* ('the city... down into the stronghold, where your brother is' 939–40). Jesus tells him that he will endure severe bodily violence before offering reassurances that he will eventually succeed in converting the Mermedonians. Andrew enters the city following the path revealed to him, in a passage that seems to draw on the journey of Beowulf and his men from the Danish coast to Heorot. These lines focus on the roads within the town rather than its buildings:

Ða wæs gemyndig modgeþyldig,  
beorn beaduwe heard; eode in burh hraðe,  
anræd oretta, elne gefyrðred,  
maga mode rof, meotude getreowe.  
Stop on stræte (stig wisode),  
swa hine nænig gumena ongitan ne mihte,  
synfulra geseon.

[Then was he mindful, man of mental patience, warrior hard in battle; quickly entered town, a single-minded soldier sustained by valour, a fellow brave at heart, true to the Measurer. Marched up the street (a pathway guided) so that him none of those men could notice, nor full of sin see him.]

(*Andreas* 981–87)

Upon reaching the town lock-up, the seven guards who are keeping watch over the captives are struck dead by an unseen hand (990–1003).<sup>19</sup> Andrew then frees Matthew and his companions from this *deaðwang* ('place of death' 1003) and *gnornhof* ('dismal building' 1008, 1043), before sending them out of Mermedonia to safety.

Not long after this, the Mermedonians discover the empty prison and its bloodied threshold, and gather together at a bronze pillar to hold an extraordinary general meeting. Here they use a divining rod to decide who will be eaten in place of their captives. This settles on one of their elders, who, in a parody of God's sacrifice of Jesus, or Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, gives up his own son to save his skin. Andrew spoils their plans to murder the boy by destroying their weapons, which melt in much the same manner as the giant-sword in Grendel's lair, prompting a collective display of grief from the Mermedonians:

18 Garner discusses the Mermedonian prison, but argues that it belongs to 'a traditional collocation of images associated with confinement' rather than a naturalistic landscape. She suggests, partially due to a dearth of archaeological evidence for specialized prisons, that prisoners 'were likely kept in yards'; see Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 69–83 (esp. 83).

19 Interestingly, the half-line describing their death — *ealle swylt fornam* ('death carried them all off' 994) — bears a close resemblance to the fate of the dead in *The Ruin*; *swylt eal fornóm* ('death carried them all off' 26).

þa was wop hæfen in wera burgum,  
 hlud heriges cyrm; hreopon friccan,  
 mændon meteleaste, meðe stodon  
 hunger gehæfte. Hornsalu wundedon  
 weste, winræced; welan ne benohton  
 beornas to brucanne on þa bitran tid.

[Then the sound of weeping was raised up in the cities of the people, the loud crowd's uproar. Heralds cried out, and bewailed a famine, whilst weary men stood about, imprisoned by their hunger. The gabled buildings endured, but those places of joy were empty; men had no need to make use of riches in that bitter time.]

(*Andreas* 1155–60)

The description of Mermedonia's buildings as being devoid of occupants at this time draws attention to the opposition between the kinds of practices that should usually take place within feasting halls (i.e. feasting, drinking, gift exchange, oaths, etc.), and the Mermedonians' customary consumption of human flesh. Here the *Andreas* poet may be making a similar point to the poet of *The Wanderer*, who describes ruined buildings as cenotaphs evoking memories of their former occupants. There are plenty of people here who *could* occupy Mermedonia's halls, but don't. Whilst in the short term this is because they are starving, and there is no feasting to be had, in the longer term they are ravenous because they do not participate in those good practices that bind together a society under God. As a consequence, these hall buildings lie empty, serving only as a sounding board for their wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In Chapter 2 I argued that in *The Wanderer*, after the speaker has finally confronted the loss of all earthly joys in the *ubi sunt* section, the wind-blown buildings are seemingly transformed back into storm-battered cliffs, deprived as they are of any function in human society. Something similar seems to have taken place in *Andreas*, although here it is the acceptance of Satan and the rejection of God which has transformed the lofty hall buildings of Mermedonia into the piles of rubble over which the Mermedonians drag Andrew — a form of lynching that Edward Irving understatedly referred to as Andrew's 'special punishment'.<sup>20</sup>

Drogon deormode æfter duns-cræfum,  
 ymb stanhleoðo stærcedferþþe,  
 efne swa wide swa wegas tolagon,  
 enta ærgeweorc, innan burgum,  
 stræte stanfage. Storm upp aras  
 æfter ceasterhofum, cirm unlytel  
 hæðnes heriges.

20 Casteen, 'Andreas: Mermedonian Cannibalism and Figural Narrative', p. 78; Irving, 'A Reading of *Andreas*', p. 231.



Figure 4.1. An ancient trackway with cart ruts in Syracuse, Sicily, evoking the landscape of Andrew's dragging. Photograph: Author.

[The valiant dragged him by ravines in the downs, around the stone cliffs, men of strengthened hearts just as far as the diverse roads extended, once the works of giants within the town, streets paved with stone. A storm rose up through city buildings, no small outcry from the heathen band.]

(*Andreas* 1232–38)

It is clear from the phrase *enta ærgeweorc* ('the ancient works of giants') that this landscape is of human(oid) construction, but from this description it seems clear that these buildings are in an advanced state of decay. This torture apparently takes place *innan burgum*, within the fortifications of Mermedonia rather than outside its walls, but the urban fabric is described in terms that evoke an unstable landscape in a state of advanced decay; walls have become cliffs and mountain gorges, and roads have become rocky scree.

Following further tortures and an impassioned appeal to God for mercy, to which God responds by healing Andrew's wounds and transforming the blood he has shed into flowering trees, Andrew looks upon the pillars in the walls of his jail cell:

He be wealle geseah wundrum fæste  
 under sælwage sweras unlytle,  
 stapulas standan storme bedrifene,  
 eald enta geweorc.

[By the wall he saw some columns of no mean size wondrously firm beneath  
 the first-floor storey, pillars standing scoured by weather, old works of giants.]

(*Andreas* 1492–95)

Andrew appeals to one of these columns, *mihtig on modrof* ('mighty and bold in spirit' 1496), saying that God has commanded it to burst apart and release a great torrent *to wera cwealme* ('unto the destruction of men' 1507). This is an unexpected invention, and not found in either of the poem's Greek and Latin analogues, both of which mention a statue from whose mouth the flood emerges.<sup>21</sup> Although this section of the narrative is otherwise anchored securely in the poet's source material, his mention of *eald enta geweorc*, and *stapulas* standing *storme bedrifene* is unique to *Andreas*.<sup>22</sup>

Water then springs from the base of this pillar in a symbolic baptism of Mermedonia, whose walls are surrounded by celestial fire to prevent any of its inhabitants from escaping.<sup>23</sup> In effect, by summoning the waters from beneath this pillar, Andrew makes himself master of the city through the power of God, and as the floodwater rises, threatening to overwhelm Mermedonia, and transforming it into an enormous font, he takes possession of the forbidding landscape and all the terms that had been associated with it, releasing them from their associations with death and desolation. One of the citizens, a *feasceaft hæleð* ('poor man' 1556), recognizes their perilous predicament and appeals to the rest of his kinsmen, calling upon them to look to Andrew, and saying that *us bið gearu sona sybb æfter sorge, gif we secað to him* ('peace after sorrow will be ours immediately, if we seek it from him' 1567–68). At this, Andrew *het streamfare stillan, stormas restan ymbe stanhleoðu* ('commanded the running stream to be still, the storms to be at rest about the stone-piles' 1575–77). The earth dries as his feet touch its surface.

Ða se beorg tohlad,  
 eorðscræf egeslic, ond þær in forlet  
 flod fæðmian, fealewe wægas;  
 geotende gegrind grund eall forswealg.

21 See discussion in Bintley, 'The Stones of the Wall Will Cry Out'.

22 This description seems to draw directly upon the description of the dragon's mound in *Beowulf* (2542–49). Here, as we look down into the barrow, it is not a stream of water than bursts forth from beneath the pillars, but dragon's fire. Irving notes that in the source, it is a statue rather than a pillar to which Andrew speaks. See Irving, 'A Reading of *Andreas*', p. 234, and further discussion in *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley. I discuss the distinction between the analogues and the pillar in Bintley, 'Aguas ab Aquis'.

23 Walsh, 'The Baptismal Flood in the Old English *Andreas*'. The most thorough analysis of this episode and motif in *Andreas* can be found in Anlezark, *Water and Fire*; see also further discussion in Bintley, 'Aguas ab Aquis'.

[Then that barrow opened up, that terrible earth-grave, and therein he let the flood be encompassed, the fallow waves; the ground entirely swallowed up the churning torrent.]

(*Andreas* 1587–90)

Mermedonia is a very different place after the flood. The negative terms used to refer to the antediluvian town are plain enough; it is referred to once as a *hæðnan burg* ('heathen stronghold' 111), and twice (by the sailors and by God), as a *mæran byrig* ('infamous stronghold' 40, 287, 973). Following the conversion of its inhabitants after their symbolic baptism, the city becomes a place of what Magennis has termed 'admirable community'.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, a *cirice* ('church' 1633), *Godes tempel* ('God's temple' 1634), is built on the very spot from whence the *flood onsprang* ('flood sprang forth' 1635), to ensure that the citizens abandon their *diofolgild* ('offerings to devils' 1641), and *ealde ealhstedas* ('ancient pagan temples' 1642). It becomes a *beorhtan byrig* ('bright city' 1649), a *goldburg* ('golden city' 1655), and a *winbyrig* ('wine city' 1672), in which its inhabitants can enjoy *secga seledream ond sincgestreon* ('the joys of men and treasure-giving' 1656).

The only place that retains any negative associations must therefore be the *beorg* into which the purifying waters are washed, bearing the fourteen most sinful Mermedonians beneath the earth, and presumably down to hell. Irving questioned whether the *beorg* should perhaps be considered a 'pagan grave-mound', without giving much consideration to the potential significance of this feature.<sup>25</sup> Barrows, as places of execution and execution burial, appear to have been a focus for negative superstitions in the late-Saxon period, as is well attested by the evidence of texts, art, and archaeology, and were particularly associated with 'supernatural entities, either singly or as collective groups'.<sup>26</sup> As Sarah Semple has shown, the interment of criminals in and around barrows at this time was deliberately undertaken in order to 'heighten the punishment of wrongdoers and extend it after death',<sup>27</sup> as well as serving as a 'physical sign of the alienation of these people from society'.<sup>28</sup> The presence of the Church in Mermedonia thus serves to cleanse it of the evil that had dwelt within it, actively transferring negative mythologies previously connected with stone buildings to an appropriately heathen feature of the landscape.<sup>29</sup>

The following points can be drawn from the discussion of *Andreas* so far. The poet presents Mermedonia as an urban place identifiable with a Roman walled settlement

24 Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 174; Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, p. 25.

25 Irving, 'A Reading of *Andreas*', p. 236. See discussion in *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by North and Bintley.

26 Semple, 'A Fear of the Past', p. 113; Williams, 'Ancient Landscapes and the Dead'; Reynolds, 'Crime and Punishment', pp. 904–06; Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*.

27 Semple, 'A Fear of the Past', p. 123.

28 Semple, 'Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', p. 241.

29 As Ellis-Davidson noted, there are examples in the archaeological record where early Christian churches were 'sometimes built beside or even over a burial mound'; the Taplow burial, for instance, stands within the old churchyard; Ellis-Davidson, 'The Hill of the Dragon', p. 175.



whose inhabitants cluster together in its derelict buildings, subsisting on the flesh of outsiders. Following Andrew's expedition, in which he frees the captives, undergoes brutal torture, and symbolically baptizes the Mermedonia in the name of God, a church is built which sanctifies the intramural area, enabling it to become a good and fitting place for human habitation. As noted, a *terminus ante quem* for *Andreas* is provided by the approximate dating of the Vercelli Book c. 975, whilst a *terminus post quem* may be offered by the poem's relationship with *Beowulf*. *Andreas* might therefore feasibly describe the efforts of the Church at any time since the beginning of the seventh century to reclaim intramural Roman space for the re-establishment of Christendom in the English landscape.<sup>30</sup> Church communities within these areas were essential to the daily life of any such ministry. However, *Andreas* is a poem that is far more concerned with transforming a city like Mermedonia into a place where a church (and the Church) would be central to daily life, at the same time encouraging the development of a wider community that would also be fully engaged in secular practices — *secga seledream ond sincgestreon, beorht bealgselu* ('the hall-joys of men, and treasure giving of the bright ring-hall' 1656–57). This concern, as this chapter will go on to argue, was decidedly more characteristic of the urban developments that took place in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. It may follow, therefore, that *Andreas* formed part of a conscious ideological impetus to recast abandoned settlements characterized by stone buildings as places for the rebirth and reinvention of Christian community.

## The Archaeology of the Burghal Hidage

What began as piracy in the late eighth century, as Frank Stenton argued, did not become serious settlement until well into the ninth.<sup>31</sup> During the campaigns by which the Danes won control of fledgling civic centres, they benefitted greatly from internal conflicts such as the civil war between Osberht and Ælle in 865, a diversion which allowed the Great Heathen Army to seize control of York in 866.<sup>32</sup> This position, from which a combined force of reconciled Northumbrian rivals failed to oust them in 867, marked a loss that was instrumental in the fall of Northumbria.<sup>33</sup> These armies wasted no time in exploiting the defensive potential of walled Roman settlements like York against the limited capacity of their enemies for siege warfare, and seized the opportunity to occupy and refortify them.<sup>34</sup> There are various instances in Asser's *Life* of King Alfred and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* where besieged heathen raiders escape their fortifications under the cover of night to overpower the inhabitants of the nearest walled settlement, only hours after pledging to behave themselves and quit the country.<sup>35</sup> It is

30 See Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 249, 273.

31 Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 237–73; Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, pp. 90–91.

32 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. E, ed. by Irvine, p. 48; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS. A, ed. by Bately, p. 47.

33 Walker, *Mercia and the Making of England*, pp. 50–51.

34 Hall, *English Heritage Book of York*, p. 37.

35 See Chapter 49 in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, pp. 36–38.



not my aim to summarize what the 'vikings' did in England (and elsewhere in Britain, Ireland, and so on) in the ninth and tenth centuries, and any attempt to do so within the confines of this study would inevitably oversimplify what took place. However, the capture of York offers an excellent example of the capabilities of armies and warbands at this time.<sup>36</sup> They could move at speed, avoiding entanglement in pitched battles, and were capable of establishing defensible positions for significant periods of time before making an escape without risking direct confrontation. Furthermore, and much to the consternation of English commentators, they apparently cared little for the oaths that they swore by either Christian or pagan gods. For these reasons, amongst others, Richard Abels has claimed that whilst conquests in East Anglia, Northumbria and Mercia effectively 'extinguished their royal houses' between 867–879, 'Wessex survived the onslaught because of Alfred's military and political genius'<sup>37</sup>

This new kind of offensive warfare was met with a similarly novel embedded approach to the defence of the landscape, namely the burghal system thought to have been introduced under Alfred and developed by his successors.<sup>38</sup> This system made an invaluable contribution to the defence of Wessex in the ninth century, and the reclamation of lost Mercian territories in the tenth.<sup>39</sup> Baker and Brookes, in their recent interdisciplinary study of its operation in the landscape, have described it as a 'systematic approach to defence, incorporating centralized planning, significant communal investment of labour and resources, and an overarching military strategy'.<sup>40</sup> They assign the strongholds of the burghal system three principal characteristics: firstly, they 'were capable of sustained resistance', being well equipped with physical defences and effective garrisons; secondly, they provided effective places of refuge for civilians; and thirdly, they also had 'wider military use as bases from which to launch large-scale attacks or counter-attacks'.<sup>41</sup>

Although the document describing the Burghal Hidage is thought likely to postdate 914, it has nevertheless been taken to indicate how Alfred intended individual burhs to be maintained during his reign.<sup>42</sup> Martin Biddle has argued that the original burghal system was probably instituted at some point between

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36 Richard Abels has argued that the Great Heathen Army, although 'great' in size, was not an organized in quite the way that the term 'army' suggests, and as such draws a parallel not with 'Churchill facing down a Germanic invasion', but with 'George W. Bush desperately trying to objectify terrorism in order to deal with it in a proper military manner'. See Abels, 'Alfred the Great, the *micel Hæden* Here and the Viking Threat', pp. 265, 279.

37 Abels, *Alfred the Great*, p. 124.

38 Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 91; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 207.

39 The most comprehensive recent assessments of the burghal system from archaeological and historical perspectives are Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, and Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*.

40 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 64.

41 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 64–65.

42 Abels, *Alfred the Great*, p. 204. The existing document would therefore date — at the earliest — to the reign of Alfred's successor, Edward the Elder. See also discussion in Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p. 209; Russo, *Town Origins and Development*, p. 105; Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 63–66, 114; Davis, 'Alfred and Guthrum's Frontier', p. 809; Hill, 'The Burghal Hidage'; Hill, 'The Calculation and the Purpose of the Burghal Hidage'.

880 and Alfred's 'reoccupation' of London in 886 (according to Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), although Haslam has suggested the slightly earlier date of 879, almost immediately after the defeat of Guthrum's army at Edington in 878, on the grounds that the terms of the document have much in common with Alfred's wish that the Danes should withdraw from bases at Cirencester and Fulham that were threatening Wessex.<sup>43</sup> Haslam, however, has more recently argued that the document is a 'near contemporary record of a complete system of burhs', as the places listed within it are cited in a 'rational order as a clockwise circuit around the West Saxon kingdom', and that it was planned by Alfred as a 'spatially coherent system initiated and put in place at one moment in time', and included the burh at Buckingham usually assumed to date the document to post-914.<sup>44</sup>

Whether the hidage was planned and implemented wholesale, or was planned during the reign of Alfred and implemented in different ways in different places during the reigns of Alfred and Edward, the basis of the system was that each stronghold should be responsible for defending a predetermined area of land. Every pole's-length of defensive fortifications should be defended by four men, and every hide of land protected by the stronghold should provide one man for this purpose, as the Burghal Hidage document (version A) stipulates:<sup>45</sup>

To anes æceres bræde on wealstillinge and to þære wære gebirgeað xvi hida. Gif ælc hid byþ be anum men gemannod, þonne mæg man gesettan ælce gyrde mid feower mannum. Þonne gebyrð to twentigan gyrðan on wealstillinge, hundæhtatig hida; and to þam furlange gebirgeað oþer healf hund hida and x hida, be þam ilcan getæle þe ic her bebufan tealde.<sup>46</sup>

[For the maintenance and defence of an acre's breadth of wall, 16 hides are required: if each hide is represented by one man, then every pole-length (of wall) can be manned by four men. And so for the maintenance of twenty poles of wall, eighty hides are required; and for a furlong, 160 hides are required, according to the same reckoning which I set out above here.]

These burhs — whether they were planned towns, refortified existing towns, reoccupied Roman sites, or Iron Age strongholds — generally seem to have been sited with 'defensive properties much in mind', over or near existing settlements, in order to provide a uniform and unified network of fortifications, with a minimum distance

43 Haslam, 'King Alfred and the Vikings', pp. 122–29. The abandonment of Cirencester and Fulham can be found in chaps 60 and 61 of Asser's *Vita*, and the reoccupation of London in chap. 83; see Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Sevenson, pp. 48, 69.

44 Haslam, 'The Burghal Hidage and the West Saxon Burhs', pp. 143, 145, 154.

45 For a description of the form that these earth and timber fortifications took when not incorporating Roman walls, see Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 72–83; Hall, 'Burhs and Boroughs', p. 606.

46 Rumble, 'An Edition and Translation of the Burghal Hidage'.

of twenty miles between sites acting as an incentive to extramural development.<sup>47</sup> It was for this reason, Richard Hodges argued, that a number of these places came in time to serve a 'dual militaristic and economic function', as attested by the 'civilian vici' beyond their walls.<sup>48</sup>

Although the various types of settlements and places fortified as burhs differed according to the opportunities afforded by the existing landscape of Wessex (and Mercia), the demands that the system placed on the population for the protection of their fortifications suggests that this project was undertaken with a strong sense of uniformity in mind. Baker and Brookes note that evidence for the major defensive circuits indicated in the hidage and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has been found at a number of sites, including some in Mercia at Hereford, Winchcombe, and at the Burghal Hidage sites at Christchurch, Cricklade, Lydford, Lyng, Oxford, Wallingford, Wareham, Wilton, and Worcester, where 'in all cases the structural sequence demonstrates the construction of substantial earthen ramparts, which in nearly every case are enhanced by a second phase of construction'.<sup>49</sup> These defences, 'despite minor variations of constructional detail... display striking similarity in form and size'.<sup>50</sup> Although, as Baker and Brookes write, 'there is a paucity of datable evidence from every known example', due to the uniformity of these arrangements 'it has become commonplace in excavation reports to discuss defences in relation to West Saxon — specifically Alfredian — burh-building', whilst a second phase of building has been dated to anywhere between the early tenth to early eleventh centuries.<sup>51</sup>

When considering this apparent uniformity, it is worth considering the extent to which some (though not all) burghal defences correlates closely with the 'hidage assessment figure', according to the length of measuring rods that were used in the construction of other settlements.<sup>52</sup> At least two lengths of rod have been recognized in early medieval England, a 5.03m rod and a 4.65m rod, with the latter having still been in service in northern Germany until as late as the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> In the past decade, research by John Blair has shown that the short perch (around 4.6m) was used in Kent, Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia to lay out a variety of settlements using 'pre-surveyed, geometrically precise grids', suggesting that these settlements and their surrounding landscapes may have been 'more formally and more extensively planned than ever realized'.<sup>54</sup> As Huggins noted, the success of 'maintaining standard rods over hundreds of miles' is indicative of the need for (and

47 Keen, 'The Towns of Dorset', pp. 242, 231; Haslam, 'The Towns of Devon', p. 264. For a consideration of burhs established outside of Wessex that do not appear in the Burghal Hidage see Griffiths, 'The North-West Mercian Burhs'.

48 Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, p. 165; see also discussion in Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City*, pp. 58–61; Britnell, 'The Economy of British Towns', p. 110.

49 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 72.

50 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 72.

51 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 72.

52 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, pp. 119–23.

53 Huggins, 'Anglo-Saxon Timber Building Measurements', pp. 7, 22; Fernie, 'Anglo-Saxon Lengths and the Evidence of the Buildings', pp. 2–3.

54 Blair, 'Grid-Planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements', pp. 18, 55.



with the same degree of precision, and it seems that no single principle will apply to all the forts of the hidage; figures seem to indicate the particular requirement for 'individual decisions reflecting differing local military and administrative needs'.<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Brooks suggested that statistical inconsistencies may also be attributed on one level to a lack of surviving evidence for timber outworks, which go unrepresented in our calculations.<sup>60</sup> More recently, Baker and Brookes have argued that the material record reveals few 'genuinely close correlations' between the 'dimensions ascertained archaeologically' and those given in the Burghal Hidage document, the exception being amongst '*de novo* burhs, where approximately half have less than a 10% discrepancy'.<sup>61</sup> George Molyneaux has further argued that the formula may have been developed by those who were familiar with the length of Winchester's defences 'and the number of hides pertaining thereto', but that its authors seem to have been 'largely ignorant about many of the other locations on the list'.<sup>62</sup> Despite the shadow that seems to have fallen between the ideal of Winchester and the reality of other contemporary burhs, in conceptual terms it was perhaps the motion, rather than the act, which might have been of greater symbolic importance to those responsible for implementing this system.

Several points can be drawn from this evidence that are of wider importance to this study. Chief amongst them is what John Maddicott has called Alfred's 'talent for fractions and arithmetic in general', as we know from other aspects of his life and government, including the rotational system for military service and the story of his development of 'graduated candles for telling the time'.<sup>63</sup> This might be the case whether we imagine 'Alfred' to have been one individual (the king himself), the king in collaboration with a group of people, or the image of the king to whom these ideas were later attributed. Maddicott writes that one of Alfred's gifts was a knack for administration, and an ability to make use of the available resources with great efficiency. Alfred was able to recognise the technical difficulties of the military and social programmes that needed to be undertaken, and those practical concerns that emerged from the relationship between the people taking part in these and the places in which they would live, labour, and might die defending. He may also have known, if he was as interested in vernacular poetry as Asser suggests, that they needed to understand the part they were to play in the future of these endeavours.

Whilst there is no reason why the units of measurement used in the hidage (with varying degrees of success) should have differed significantly from those that had been used to determine the layout of planned settlements for generations, it is also worth bearing in mind how this may have served to reinforce material connections both with the past, and with other types of settlements outside the defences of these strongholds. This would parallel the discussion of 'hall' buildings in the previous

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59 Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, p. 119.

60 Brooks, *Communities and Warfare*, pp. 116–19.

61 Baker and Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, p. 121.

62 Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century*, p. 88.

63 Maddicott, 'Trade, Industry, and the Wealth of King Alfred', pp. 5–6.

chapter, and the maintenance of the hall as a cultural symbol despite potentially significant variation in the form and function of these buildings over time. There are practical considerations at play here, but also cultural continuities that were no doubt ideologically beneficial to elites responsible for effecting change and development. A final consideration is the connection that the Burghal Hidage document establishes between people, land, and fortifications. On the one hand this again served a practical purpose in determining the practical deployment of 'human resources'. On the other, it also created a direct connection between the physical defences of these places, their human defenders, and the peoples and landscapes from which they were drawn.<sup>64</sup> In this sense the document did not simply establish terms for the implementation of a practical system of defence; it also showed how this ideological matrix could be realised in the built environment.

## Society, Settlements, and the 'Alfredian' Translations

Inculcating a sense of collective social responsibility formed part and parcel of the implementation of this system, and it is no surprise to find an emphasis on this in Alfred's preface to the *Pastoral Care*, and in the translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* which, if it was not authored under Alfred, nevertheless emerged from much the same cultural milieu. Although these texts do not often directly reflect the experience of buildings, architecture, and settlements, this analysis will complement the preceding discussion of the relationship between individuals and the built environment, and my discussion of the same relationship in the preface to the *Soliloquies*. The way in which people understood contemporary settlement cannot be adequately represented without understanding how they conceived of social order. There is a direct connection between the archaeological record and the Burghal Hidage document, just as there is a direct connection between this document and the *Pastoral Care*. I will foreground this relationship before going on to consider other works conducive to the implementation and management of this system. Ultimately, if unsurprisingly, ideas promoted by the programme of translation and dissemination can be seen to parallel the interests of the burghal system.

### *Pastoral Care*

The foundations of the Alfredian canon are now far less secure than they once were. As Godden and Irvine's introduction to the Old English *Consolation of Philosophy* makes plain, it is no longer possible to make the unqualified claim that all of those works usually ascribed to the Alfredian era were actively produced under the king's

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64 On the practicalities of military organization and mustering in this period see Baker and Brookes, 'Explaining Anglo-Saxon Military Efficiency'.

direction.<sup>65</sup> Whilst this is not an issue that can be sidestepped, this study does not aim to offer a comprehensive alternative framework for the means by which these translations were produced, or how they have come to be seen as Alfredian works. The following argument proceeds on the basis that even if these texts were not Alfred's work, they promote many of the same ideas that were favoured by Alfred and his successors. Amongst other things they place strong emphasis on interdependence, and the duty of the individual to the kingdom — all ideals which, if long established in literary culture by this point, were of increased importance in this period of turbulence. It may be useful to consider the translations and prefaces discussed in this chapter as variations on a theme by Alfred (or perhaps borrowed by Alfred from his predecessors) that served as the basis for development by his successors. Or, by the same token, as imitations and reproductions of a great master's work by disciples and copyists who recognised its commercial and ideological potential, even if the movement's originator was in fact more of a gifted self-publicist than a skilled craftsman.

One of the texts still thought to have been translated into the vernacular under Alfred, in part because Alfred lays claim to it in the Old English preface, was the *Pastoral Care* of Pope Gregory the Great, a work which Bede had celebrated (alongside Gregory himself) in his *Historia*, writing that:

Alium quoque librum composuit egregium, qui uocatur Pastoralis, in quo manifesta luce patefecit, quales ad ecclesiae regimen adsumi, qualiter ipsi rectores uiuere, qua discretione singulas quasque audientium instruere personas, et quanta consideratione propriam cotidie debeant fragilitatem pensare.

[He composed another remarkable book called the *Pastoral Care*, in which he set forth in the clearest manner what sort of persons would be chosen to rule the Church and how these rulers ought to live; with how much discrimination they should instruct different types of listeners and how earnestly they ought each day to reflect on their own frailty.]<sup>66</sup>

The aims of this work, as Bede writes here, were perfectly in keeping with the aims stated in the preface to the Old English translation. Nicole Discenza has argued that the translation of the *Pastoral Care*, with its accompanying preface, was part of a process of social construction designed to make its readers 'recipients and subjects; the text directs them, and they must carry out its instructions.'<sup>67</sup> The chain of earthly authority it establishes is the same one that first connected Britain to Rome via Gregory and Augustine. A silent assumption is made that this authority, preserved in the wisdom of writers like Bede, has passed to Alfred. From here, it reaches onwards and outwards through the translation of the work, not only to the readers (ecclesiastical or otherwise) who were the direct recipients of the vernacular, but also to all those

65 For extended discussion of these problems and possibilities, see *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, pp. 134–46.

66 *HE* II. 1 (pp. 126–27).

67 Discenza, 'Alfred's Verse Preface', p. 627.



who were to be instructed in its message.<sup>68</sup> As is so often the case in Old English texts, there is an implicit emphasis on the binding qualities of this wisdom, which to the king's mind is clearly conducive to the 'right' way of doing things.

The opening of this preface, 'personal in tone and public in intention', emphasizes the link between the importance of learning in the Scriptural tradition, and the role that books were to play in the rebuilding of Alfred's kingdom.<sup>69</sup> He begins by looking back to an imagined golden age, perhaps the time of Bede, when the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authority ensured both spiritual and military victories:

Me com swiðe oft on gemynd, hwelce wiotan iu wæron giond Angelcynn, ægðer ge godcundra hada ge woruldcundra; and hu gesæliglica tida ða wæron giond Angelcynn; and hu ða kyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces on ðam dagum Gode and his ærendwrecum hersumedon; and hie ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodo ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon, and eac ut hiora eðel gerymdon; and hu him ða speow ægðer ge mid wige ge mid wisdom.<sup>70</sup>

[It has come very often to my mind, what wise men there once were throughout the English, both in holy and secular orders; and how blessed times there were then throughout the English; and how those kings who then had power over this people in those days obeyed God and his messengers; and how they maintained their peace, and their good conduct, and their power at home, and also expanded their lands outwards; and how they excelled both in war and in wisdom.]

This establishes the importance of a relationship between ecclesiastical and secular interests. It is strongly reminiscent of the construction of the Church from stones and timbers in *De Templo*, but clear that the role of the king in maintaining this balance (*contra* Bede, to some degree) is of equal importance. Alfred's vision moves from the vibrance of *gesæliglica tida* to a more recent past, immediately before his reign, in which England had been bereft of spiritual wisdom:

Swa clæne hio wæs oðfeallenu on Angelkynne ðætte swiðe feawa wæron behionan Humbre þe hiora ðenunga cuðen understandan on Englisc, oððe furðum an ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccan; and ic wene ðætte nauht monige begeondan Humbre næren.<sup>71</sup>

[So utterly had it declined amongst the English that there were very few men on this side of the Humber who could understand their ministry in English, or even translate one single letter of Latin into English; and I think that there were not many beyond the Humber who could either.]

68 Discenza, 'Alfred's Verse Preface', pp. 627–30.

69 Szarmach, 'The Meaning of Alfred's Preface', p. 63.

70 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 2.

71 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 2. References are to the Cotton MS as edited by Sweet.

Once again, by placing particular emphasis on the chain of understanding between individuals, these lines emphasize the extent to which learning had declined in England before Alfred — to such a degree that almost all of these links had been broken. The Humber cuts across the intellectual landscape of this preface like a censor's pencil, dividing the wisdom of Bede's Northumbrians from the present ignorance of the Mercians and West Saxons south of the river. This theme continues with particular emphasis on the relationship between intellectually-empowered individuals and the various servants of God for whom they are responsible:

Ða ic þa ðis eall gemunde ða gemunde ic eac hu ic geseah, ærþæmþe hit eall forhergod wære and forbærned, hu þa cirican geond eall Angelkynn stodon maðma and boca gefylða and eac micel menigu Godes ðeowa and þa swiðe lytle feorme ðara boca wiston, forþæmþe hie heora nan wuht ongietan ne meahton, forþæmþe hie næron on hiora ægen geðeode awritene.<sup>72</sup>

[When I brought all this to mind, then I also reflected upon how I had seen, before it was all ravaged and burned, how those churches throughout all of England stood filled with treasures and books, and also many of God's servants, who derived very little nourishment from those books, because they could not understand anything of them, because they were not written in their own language.]

The connections drawn here are thus designed to forge or strengthen various bonds across the perceived boundaries of peoples and nations, social strata, divisions between secular and sacred, and across time. This is a clear effort to connect the intellectual efforts of the early English Church and its royal patrons with those of Alfred in the present.

Whilst the emphasis on human experience throughout this preface is not what we would expect from Bede, it is in keeping with the nature of Alfred's innovations. A conscious effort is made to show the development of the king's thought process as he considers the reasons why the fathers of the English Church did not translate their works into the vernacular:

Ða ic þa ðis eall gemunde, þa wundrode ic swiðe swiðe þara godena godra witena þe giu wæron geond Angelcynn, and þa bec befullan ealla geleornod hæfdon, þæt hi hiora þa nanne dæl noldon on hiora ægen geðeode wendan. Ac ic þa sona eft me selfum andwyrde and cwæð: Hie ne wendon þætte æfre men sceoldon swa reccelease weorðan and sio lar swa oðfeallan.<sup>73</sup>

[When I ruminated upon all of this, then I pondered greatly upon why those good wise men who once were throughout England, and who had so thoroughly studied those books, that they did not wish to translate any part of them into their own language. But I immediately then answered myself

72 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 4.

73 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 4.

and said: ‘They did not think that men should ever become so reckless, and that learning would become so decayed.’]

The personal Alfred, the image and character of the polymathic translator and king, is brought to the fore here, galvanizing his position in the chain as a contemplative figure blessed with spiritual wisdom. Alfred goes on to reveal the role he is attempting to establish for himself in this tradition. He demonstrates the pedigree of his undertaking by first describing the foundation of the Law amongst the Israelites, before the Greeks translated it into their own language, and the Romans did the same. From hereon, the implied influence of the Romans (and their Church) meant that *ealla oðra Cristena ðioda* (‘all other Christian peoples’) could go on to translate at least some part of this teaching into their own language.<sup>74</sup> We can see in these lines a movement from East to West that resonates with the movement of the sun in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, whose predetermined path parallels the inevitable victory of the combined forces of Wessex and Mercia:

Feld dænnede  
 secga swate siðþan sunne up  
 on morgentid, mære tungol,  
 glad ofer grundas, Godes condel beorht,  
 eces Drihtnes, oð sio æþele gesceaft  
 sah to setle.

[The field darkened with the blood of men since the sun rose in the morning tide, that glorious star, wondrous over the earth, the bright candle of God the eternal Lord, until that this noble creation sank to its rest.]

(*Brunanburh* 12–17)

A connection between *Brunanburh* and the preface may not be immediately obvious, but the two are without doubt both concerned with propagating the same sense that divinely ordained events are taking place. Wisdom has passed from east to west as surely as the rising of the sun and its setting, and as surely as the conquest of Britain referred to at the end of the poem, which celebrates the slaughter of Scots and vikings as readily as the slaughter of the British.<sup>75</sup> A similar idea is expressed in the verse preface to the *Pastoral Care*, which refers to Augustine’s journey to Britain *ofer sealtne sæ suðan* (‘from the south over the salt sea’), using the same motif as the *Brunanburh* poem, which describes how *Engle and Seaxe up becoman ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan* (‘the Angles and the Saxons came up, sought Britain over the broad sea’ 70–71). Alfred and those who followed in his footsteps may then have been attempting to depict the transmission of Christian learning in terms which echoed the part it had to play in his creation of an *Anglécynn* through Christian wisdom and military prowess.

<sup>74</sup> *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> See further discussion in Chapter 1.

Having situated himself within this tradition, Alfred goes on to explain the part he intends his subjects to play within this plan, and thus their role as spiritual successors to the Israelites, Greeks, and Romans:

Forðy me ðyncð betre, gif iow swa ðyncð, þæt we eac suma bec, ða þe nidbeðyrfesta sien eallum monnum to witanne, þæt we þa on ðæt geðeode wenden þe we ealle gecnawan mægen, and ge don swa we swiðe eaðe magon mid Godes fultume, gif we þa stilnesse habbað, ðætte eal sio gioguð þe nu is on Angel kynne friora monna, þara þe þa speda hæbben þæt hie ðæm befeolan mægen, sien to leornunga oðfæste, þa hwile þe hi to nanre oðerre note ne mægen, oð ðone first þe hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan: lære mon siððan furður on Lædengedeode þa þe mon furðor læran wille and to hierran hade don wille.<sup>76</sup>

[Therefore it seems better to me, if you think so too, that we should also translate those books which are most necessary for all men to know into a language which we can all understand, and do as we may very easily do with God's help, if we have peace, in such a way that all that free-born youth which are now amongst the English, who have the means that they can turn their attention to it, be set to learning, for as long as they are not needed for some other duty, until that first they can read English writing well: a man can then further teach the Latin language to those whom he wishes to teach, and to advance to higher orders.]

This passage in particular, before Alfred goes on to explain why he personally chose to translate the *Pastoral Care* first, is clearly intended to reinforce the hierarchy represented within it, and offers us the image of a society with well-defined divisions between those best suited to undertake particular tasks according to their abilities.

### **Consolation of Philosophy**

The idea of a society organized to support the king's work receives similar attention in the Old English *Consolation of Philosophy*, which was probably translated after the *Pastoral Care* at some point between 890 and 930, 'probably in southern England'.<sup>77</sup> Malcolm Godden has suggested that this work was probably 'little known, if at all' in England before the time of Alfred, allowing its translator to develop and clarify Boethius' allusions to suit their own ends, without conflicting with established readings of the text.<sup>78</sup> Exploring the contemporary significance of the *Consolation*, Susan Irvine has noted the direct comparisons that Alfred may have seen between 'barbarian' invasions at the time of Boethius, and the raids and settlements of the ninth century, which would have made the *Consolation* particularly relevant to

<sup>76</sup> *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. by Sweet, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 146.

<sup>78</sup> Godden, 'King Alfred's Boethius', pp. 419–21. A similar case is made for the Old English *Soliloquies* in Waterhouse, 'Tone in Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquies*', p. 49.

contemporary concerns.<sup>79</sup> As Joseph Witting has shown that the translator is unlikely to have used a Latin commentary in his translation of the *Consolation*, it seems sensible to approach expansions and developments in the text as additions explicitly relevant to a contemporary audience.<sup>80</sup>

One such ‘long expansion’, which departs significantly from the Latin text, and is of particular relevance to the discussion of the *Cura* so far, concerns the three orders of society that are the tools of a king’s *cræft*, and the support necessary for the maintenance of these tools.<sup>81</sup> Richard Abels has argued that this passage is especially indicative of the translator’s tendency not to translate texts literally, but rather to reflect ‘what he believed they *ought* to have said.’<sup>82</sup>

Hwæt, þu wast þæt nan mon ne mæg nænne cræft cyðan ne nænne anweald reccan ne stioran butan tolum ond andweorce; þæt bið ælces cræftes andweorc þæt mon þone cræft buton wyrcan ne mæg. Þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc ond his tol mid to ricsianne þæt he hæbbe his lond full monnad: he sceal habban gebedmen ond ferdmen ond weorcmen. Hwæt, þu wast þætte butan þissum tolum nan cyning his cræft ne mæg cyðan. Þæt is eac his ondweorc þæt he habban sceal to ðæm tolum, þam þrim geferscipum, biwiste. Þæt is þonne heora biwist: land to bugianne ond gifa ond wæpnu ond mete ond ealu ond claþas ond gehwæt þæs ðe þa þre geferscipas behofigen. Ne mæg he butan þisum þas tol gehealdan ne buton þisum tolum nan þara þinga wyrcan þe him beboden is to wyrrenne.<sup>83</sup>

[You know of course that no one can make known any skill, nor direct and guide any authority, without tools and resources; a man cannot work on any enterprise without resources. In the case of the king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he have his land fully manned: he must have praying men, fighting men and working men. You know also that without these tools no king may make his ability known. Another aspect of his resources is that he must have the means of support for his tools, the three classes of men. These, then, are their means of support: land to live on, gifts, weapons, food, ale, clothing, and whatever else is necessary for each of the three classes of men. Without these things he cannot maintain the tools, nor without the tools can he accomplish any of the things he was commanded to do.]

79 Irvine, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Idea of Rome’, p. 69.

80 Witting, ‘King Alfred’s *Boethius* and Its Latin Sources’, pp. 158, 166. Quite what the makeup of this audience may have been is a question perhaps worth some reconsideration, as noted in Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, p. 69. Katherine Proppe notes that these images are clearly intended to be those familiar to the work’s audience, and perhaps quite a broad audience at that; see Proppe, ‘King Alfred’s *Consolation of Philosophy*’, p. 644.

81 Bolton, ‘How Boethian is Alfred’s *Boethius*?’, p. 154. This passage is also selected for translation by Keynes and Lapidge as one which is representative of the ‘additions made by Alfred to the translation’, which thus represents ‘an invaluable guide to the king’s mental preoccupations’. See *Alfred the Great*, trans. by Keynes and Lapidge, p. 131.

82 Abels, *Alfred the Great*, p. 242.

83 *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 277.

In much the same fashion as the figure of King Alfred in the *Cura* preface, here the king stands at the head of these three groups of praying, fighting, and working men. Mind insists that he had no undue desire for power, but, as God chose to empower him, it seems only reasonable that a king should ask for divine aid.<sup>84</sup> He clarifies this by explaining that *craft* is something that one ought to ‘make known’, whilst *anweald* needs to be guided and steered. Divinely ordained power and skill are gifts to be used with care and attention if one is ever to be remembered as a *god cyning*:

ƿæt is nu hraƿost to secganne ƿæt ic wilnode weorðfullice to libbanne ƿa hwile  
ƿe ic lifde, ond æfter minum life ƿam monnum to læfanne ƿe æfter me wæren  
min gemynd on godum weorcum.<sup>85</sup>

[Now is that simplest to say that I desired to live worthily as long as I lived,  
and to leave after my life, to the men who should come after me, my memory  
in good works.]

The same sense of legacy is established here between the king and his successors that is found in the *Cura* preface, where Alfred writes about the loss of learning, putting words in the mouths of the unlettered English lamenting lost wisdom. In much the same way, the aim of the king in the *Consolation* is to ensure that his successors will be able to follow in his footsteps, without straying from the path he has marked out. All of this depends, however, upon the correct use of tools and materials, making the point that history and social responsibility are unavoidably bound up with the notion of human utility and commodities derived from the raw materials of the land. In this way the social programmes of teaching, learning, and the production of literature, are indivisible from the military, social, and economic reforms similarly necessary for the in-depth defence of the landscape. This both reflects and reinforces the interdependence of these various elements, in which the strength of the system lies, and which might, in Hodder’s terms, be thought of as ‘entanglement’, or in Morton’s as ‘the mesh.’<sup>86</sup> Both the *Cura* preface and the *Consolation* indicate that it is the duty of the king to maintain balance, hence the emphasis in the latter on the importance of maintaining social strata according to their various needs. It is of course no coincidence that the things that will maintain this structure, *heora biwist* (‘their support’), are exactly the sorts of things that are celebrated in Old English poetry, including land, treasures, weapons, and drink, as well as other necessities less prominent in this literature, such as food and clothing.

The conception of a society structured in this way is clearly related to the one described in *De Templo* and manifested in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. A vernacular

84 This is reminiscent of Jesus’ words in Gethsemane: ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done’ (Luke 22. 42, see also Matthew 26. 39, and John 18. 11). Thus, in addition to parallels with the Rome of Boethius facing the onslaught of barbarians, Alfred may also be comparing his struggle with Christ’s preparations for the Passion. This is in keeping with the approach to combining ‘Christian textual parallels and everyday experiences’ in the translation noted in Discenza, *The King’s English*, p. 122.

85 *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 278.

86 See further discussion pp. 25–26.

translation of this work was made at around the same time as the Alfredian translations, even if there is little evidence to suggest that the translator of Boethius knew the work, or that Alfred's circle were directly involved in its creation.<sup>87</sup> This framework was one in which a balance of secular and sacred interests could be seen to work together for the development and maintenance of the universal, eternal Church, together with those accompanying structures of temporal power maintained by good kingship.

### *Soliloquies*

With this relationship between Bede, the *Pastoral Care*, and the Old English *Consolation* in mind, I want to move on to consider the preface to the translation of St Augustine's *Soliloquies*, and address some of the ways in which this work may shed light on the perceived relationship between people and settlements. Like the *Consolation*, the *Soliloquies* reflects a similar understanding of the importance of these tools and materials, and a 'very close relationship' between the two has long been recognised.<sup>88</sup> The translation of the *Soliloquies* is likely to have taken place after the translation of the *Pastoral Care* (and the *Consolation*, if this too was an Alfredian production), if only because the preface to the *Soliloquies* seems to refer to these texts retrospectively.<sup>89</sup> This work as a whole, including the preface, has not received much attention outside of literary scholarship. As a consequence, the tendency has been to approach statements made by the 'king' in this preface as being concerned largely with the production of literature. In it, he describes himself as a woodsman on his way through the forest, looking up into the overhanging branches, and taking what he needs to manufacture tools and materials:

Gaderode me þonne kigclas, and stuþansceaftas, and lohsceaftas, and hylfa to ælcum þara tola þe ic mid wircan cuðe, and bohtimbru and bolttimbru to ælcum þara weorca þe ic wyrcan cuðe, þa wlitegostan treowo be þam dele ðe ic aberan meihte. Ne com ic naþer mid anre byrðene ham, þe me ne lyste ealne þane wude ham brengan, gif ic hyne ealne aberan meihte. On ælcum treowo ic geseah hwæthwugu þæs þe ic æt ham beþorfte.<sup>90</sup>

[I gathered then cudgels and pillars, and beams, and handles for all those tools with which I knew how to work, and bow timbers and beams for each of those buildings which I knew how to construct, the fairest trees of all that I might bear. I came neither with a single load homewards, nor did it please me to bring all of that wood homewards, though I might have borne it. In every tree I saw something which I needed at home.]

87 *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 139.

88 *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 135.

89 This ordering is referred to by Discenza, *The King's English*, p. 1; and Szarmach, 'The Meaning of Alfred's Preface', p. 70.

90 *King Alfred's Old English Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. by Hargrove, p. 1.



Numerous commentators have drawn attention to the uncharacteristically sudden opening of this work, which must either be an idiosyncrasy of this preface, or may indicate that it has been in some way truncated.<sup>91</sup> There is no preamble to suggest that the persona voicing these thoughts is the same one found in the earlier prefaces, though their tone is similarly personal and familiar, and they are both concerned with the relationship between past and present, and with offering encouragement to others to follow in their footsteps. In one respect, this process of gathering wood and timber from the forest is intended to recall the accumulation and translation of the wisdom of the Church Fathers.<sup>92</sup> Milton Gatch, who (like many) identifies the persona with Alfred, has noted that the reference in the preface to the wisdom of St Augustine, St Gregory, and St Jerome is unlikely to indicate that these were the main sources for this 'adaptation' of the *Soliloquies*, as there is no 'necessary' connection between these figures (aside from Augustine) and the Old English text.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Gatch argues that the 'unified structure' presented is manufactured from an Augustinian wood, as a consequence of which the text is structured by materials from 'the forest of patrology', as well as being 'a collection of flowers and sayings'.<sup>94</sup>

It is worth noting, given that the preface is often taken to refer to a florilegium, that not a single flower is mentioned in this particular forest of wisdom, and thus it is unfortunate that this passage has not until recently been considered in terms of the practical concerns of kings at this time, namely the practical reorganization of society, settlements, and strongholds in the landscape. Indeed, in light of the other texts considered so far in this chapter, it would be unusual if the references to tools and materials in the preface were not also intended to refer to the reordering of military and social obligations in the late ninth and tenth centuries. On this level, the gathering of wood and timber from the forest also becomes an extended metaphor for the bringing together of those best suited to particular occupations, and the materials they require in order to fulfil their duties.<sup>95</sup> As I have argued, the two can, and should, be read in both of these ways.<sup>96</sup> To read the preface in this way is to understand both the Bedan inheritance of this motif, and to recognize how — like other products of the Alfredian era — it emphasizes the importance of addressing practical and spiritual concerns in parallel.

There is an important distinction to be drawn in the preface between what the speaker says he has done, and his advice to those who might follow his example. He has brought home tools and materials, but those who follow in his track are not

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91 Gatch, 'King Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquia*', p. 17.

92 Frantzen, *King Alfred*, pp. 71–72. Rackham notes the important distinction to be made between wood and timber; wood, or underwood, is produced by taking cuttings from 'coppice stools, pollards, or small suckers', or from the branches of trees felled for timber. Timber, by contrast, is 'big stuff suitable for making planks, beams and gateposts' — in other words building material for things like houses and ships. See Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape*, p. 10.

93 Gatch, 'King Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquia*', p. 25.

94 Gatch, 'King Alfred's Version of Augustine's *Soliloquia*', p. 25.

95 Stanley, 'King Alfred's Prefaces', p. 360.

96 Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*, pp. 148–51.

specifically advised to bring home handles for tools, but rather the sorts of timbers and withies that will allow them to build their own homes and enclosures:

Forþam ic lære ælcne ðara þe maga si, and manigne wæn hæbbe, þæt he menige to þam ilcan wuda þar ic ðas stuðanscaftas cearf, fetige hym þar ma, and gefeðrige hys wænas mid fegrum gerdum, þat he mage windan manigne smicerne wah, and manig ænlic hus settan and fegerne tun timbrian þara, and þær murge and softe mid mæge on eardian ægðer ge wintras ge sumeras, swa-swa ic nu ne gyt ne dyde.<sup>97</sup>

[Therefore I advise each of those who is able, and has many wagons, that he think on that same wood where I carved these pillars, and fetch him there more, and load his wagons with fair timber, that he may twist together many fair walls, and establish many a noble house and timber a fair town thereof, and there with merriment and comfort prevail both in winters and summers, as I had not done before now.]

This wood, as well as being the wisdom of the Church Fathers, can also be thought of as the physical material necessary for the building of homesteads (on a small scale), or indeed as timber necessary for the construction of substantial fortifications and planned towns. The speaker goes on to refer to earthly (and heavenly) habitations towards the end of the preface:

Nis hit nan wundor þeah man swilc ontimber gewirce eac on þære utlade and eac on þære bytlinge; ac ælcne man lyst, siððan he ænig cotlyf on his hlafordes læne myd his fultume getimbred hæfð, þæt he hine mote hwilum þaron gerestan, and huntigan, and fuglian, and fiscian, and his on gehwile wisan to þære lænan tilian, ægþer ge on se ge on lande, oð þone fyrst þe he bocland and æce yrfe þurh his hlafordes miltse gearnige.

[It is no wonder that a man should work with timbers like these, both in their transport, and also in their assembly; but every man, if he has any dwelling on land loaned by his lord which he has built with his help, desires that he may rest there for a time, and hunt, and fowl, and fish, and set to work on that loaned land in various ways, both on sea or on land, until the time that he has earned both book-land and an eternal inheritance through his lord's favour.]<sup>98</sup>

There is also no escaping the fact that these lines refer explicitly to the construction of homes and towns, which is perfectly in keeping with the implementation of the system of strongholds referred to in the Bughal Hidage document, some of which were to function not only as fortifications, but as defensible settlements. The preface to the *Soliloquies* is not then solely reflective of spiritual interests, and the gathering and redistribution of the flowers of Christian wisdom, though this is neither to deny nor contradict the validity of this reading. It also addresses important temporal

97 *King Alfred's Old English Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. by Hargrove, p. 1.

98 *King Alfred's Old English Version of St Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. by Hargrove, p. 2.

concerns, and the practicalities of defending a society against threats that are physical as well as spiritual.

This discussion of the representation of wood and timbers in the preface to the *Soliloquies* may in turn throw new light on the passage describing the fight between Hercules and the Hydra in the Old English *Consolation*. Susan Irvine has suggested that Hercules appears in the guise of Alfred here, as ‘a prototype for the ideal Christian Roman ruler such as existed in the Carolingian Empire from the time of Charlemagne.’<sup>99</sup> Consequently, there may be ‘underlying links ... between Alfred and Hercules’ here that merit further investigation.<sup>100</sup> One feature which suggests that the Old English author was ‘familiar with a range of detail that does not precisely match either the glosses or the other standard accounts’ (Ovid, Hyginus, Isidore), is the immolation of the Hydra using wood collected by Hercules.<sup>101</sup>

Swa swa mon on ealdspellum segð þæt an nædre wære þe hæfde nigan heafdu,  
and simle gif mon anra hwilc of aslog þonne weoxon þær siofon of þam anum  
heafde. Ða gebyrede hit þæt ðær com se foremære Erculus to, se was Iobes sunu.  
Þa ne mihte he geþencan hu he hi mid ænige cræfte ofercuman sceolde, ær he hi  
bewæg mid wuda utan and forbernde þa mid fyre.<sup>102</sup>

[As people say in old stories, there was a serpent which had nine heads, and always if someone cut off one of them then seven grew there from that one head. Then it chanced that the famous Hercules, who was Jove’s son, came there. He could not think how by any means he could overcome it, before he covered it with wood and burned it with fire.]

Irvine has noted that Hercules’ destruction of the hydra using wood gathered for this purpose invites parallels with the king’s collection of timbers in the preface to the *Soliloquies*.<sup>103</sup> The hydra must have seemed a particularly apt metaphor for viking armies at this time, and thus the gathering together of these timbers could, in this context, be seen as the bringing together of various elements that were essential to the defence of the kingdom. This is not only the collection of timbers in a literal sense, for physical construction, but also the bringing together of individuals at different levels of society to serve the same purpose under the king’s authority.

Finally, although probably written in the eleventh century, the metrical epilogue that concludes the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* in MS 41 CCC may also draw on the same idea complex, as it expresses similar ideas about the relationship between kings, scribes, and those who support the latter materially (or otherwise).

<sup>99</sup> Irvine, ‘Wrestling With Hercules’, p. 185.

<sup>100</sup> Irvine, ‘Wrestling With Hercules’, p. 176.

<sup>101</sup> *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 462.

<sup>102</sup> *The Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, p. 361.

<sup>103</sup> Irvine, ‘Wrestling With Hercules’, p. 176. Hercules appears only briefly in the Latin *Consolation*, in the seventh song of book four, which describes only the destruction of the Hydra in the course of his labours; *hydra combusto periit veneno* (‘with its poison burnt up the hydra perished’), Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, trans. by H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, iv. 7 (p. 380).

The Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* concludes with the following entreaty to its reader, and perhaps also to listeners if, as its verse form may indicate, it was intended to be read aloud:

Bidde ic eac æghwylcne mann,  
 brego, rices weard, þe þas boc ræde  
 and þa bredu befo, fira aldor,  
 þæt gefyrðige þone writre wynsum cræfte  
 þe ðas boc awrat bam handum twam,  
 þæt he mote manega gyt mundum synum  
 geendigan, his aldre to willan,  
 and him þæs geunne se ðe ah ealles gewæld,  
 rodera waldend, þæt he on riht mote  
 oð his daga ende drihten herigan...<sup>104</sup>

[Guardian of the kingdom, lord of men, I also beseech each man who might read this book and hold the boards, that he support with kindly power the scribe who wrote this book with his two hands so that he might complete many more with his hands according to his lord's desire; and may He who reigns over all, the Ruler of the Heavens, grant him that he may rightly praise the Lord until the end of his days...]

This provides one possible translation of these lines, in which the reader of the book, holding its boards, is asked to support the scribe who composed it with two hands, presumably with one to steady the page, and the other to ink the vellum. However, the phrase *bam handum twam* ('with both hands') might be understood in other ways, perhaps referring to the physical support of the boards themselves in the act of reading, or to a patron's monetary support. The same words might equally refer to the reader's support of the scribe in warfare: with both hands. The ambiguous deployment of this phrase could refer to all of these possibilities simultaneously. The reader of the book, reading the book with their two hands, written by the scribe with two hands, is encouraged to participate in the defence of the realm so that the scribe *mote manega gyt mundum synum geendigan* ('might complete many more with his hands'). Going further, one might suggest other resonances between these wooden boards and those found elsewhere, such as the shield walls or 'board-walls' that sometimes appear in poetry, or indeed walls made of boards that formed part of fortifications. In either case, it may once again be an oversight to read poetic lines like these in a purely literal sense.

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<sup>104</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, p. 113.

## Society, Settlements, and Asser's *Vita Alfredi*

One final work of particular relevance to the translations undertaken at the time of Alfred is the *Vita Alfredi*, which was probably written by Asser in the late ninth century at some point between his entry into Alfred's service in 886 and Alfred's death in 899.<sup>105</sup> Although as much as half of this work drew heavily upon the vernacular Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,<sup>106</sup> the text is in Latin, and its intended audience may have been the same body of Welsh monks from which Asser had first been sent to Alfred's court.<sup>107</sup> Given that this work was intended for readers of Latin, and that the focus of this book is primarily on vernacular texts, I include it here not to claim that Asser was writing with the aim of directly influencing ideas about settlements in the same way, but on the basis that it emerged from what Simon Keynes has referred to as 'the same court branch of Saatchi and Saatchi' as the Chronicle, and offers insight into how those in a position to act on Alfred's instructions reacted to his plan of building works.<sup>108</sup>

Asser's understanding of the importance of the burghal system is clearly demonstrated by his description of the events of 867, when York was captured by the Great Heathen Army, and is in keeping with the way in which Northumbria's fall is represented elsewhere in the writings of the period:

Quibus advenientibus, pagani confestim fugam arripiunt, et intra urbis moenia se defendere procurant. Quorum fugam et pavorem Christiani cernentes, etiam intra urbis moenia eos persequi et murum frangere instituunt; quod et fecerunt. Non enim tunc adhuc illa civitas firmos et stabilitos muros illis temporibus habebat. Cumque Christiani murum, ut proposuerant, fregissent, et eorum magna pars in civitatem simul cum paganis intrasset, pagani, dolore et necessitate compulsi, super eos atrociter irrumpunt, caedunt, fugant, prosternunt intus et extra. Illic maxima ex parte omnes Northanhymbrensiū coetus, occisis duobus regibus, deleti occubuerunt. Reliqui vero, qui evaserunt, pacem cum paganis pepigerunt.<sup>109</sup>

[Upon their arrival, the pagans speedily hastened to flight, and looked to defend themselves within the ramparts of the city. Once the Christians had perceived their flight and terror, they too hastened to hunt them within the ramparts of the city and to break the wall; and they did this. For in those times the city did not yet have firm and stable walls. When the Christians had breached

105 Although the authenticity of Asser's *Vita* was disputed by Alfred Smyth, counterarguments by Simon Keynes and Richard Abels make the possibility that it was a later forgery seem unlikely. See discussion in Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*; a counterargument in Abels, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 318–26, makes the important point that there was no reason for a forged *Vita* to have been written; see also the comprehensive refutation in Keynes, 'On the Authenticity of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*'; Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', p. 115.

106 Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', pp. 117, 124.

107 Keynes, 'The Power of the Written Word', p. 181.

108 Keynes, 'The Power of the Written Word', p. 44.

109 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 27 (p. 23).

the wall, as they had intended, and the greater part of them had entered into the city with the pagans, then the pagans, compelled by grief and necessity, overran them violently, hacked them to pieces, and put them to flight, both within and without the city. By far the greater part of the entire Northumbrian army was annihilated there, and the two kings were killed. But the remainder of those who escaped from there made a peace with the pagans.]

This description of the fall of York establishes a pattern in Asser's work for the strategic capture of sites like Nottingham, and the use of fortifications such as those at Reading, from whose cover the Danes emerged to rout the English.<sup>110</sup>

In Asser's *Vita*, the turning of the tide is signalled by Alfred's relief of Rochester in 885, which the Danes ultimately failed to enter despite having constructed significant siegeworks including their own stockade, within clear sight of its gateway.<sup>111</sup> The fifteen or so chapters of the *Vita* that pass between this episode, together with the successful rout of raiding ships at the mouth of the Stour, and the reoccupation of London the following year in 886, are pivotal in Asser's portrait of Alfred.<sup>112</sup> In the course of this year, Alfred made a shrewd if foreseeable marriage alliance with the Mercian aristocracy, apparently in response to a breach of the peace by the Danes settled in East Anglia, whom Asser naturally deems to be at fault. Within these intervening chapters are found some of the *Vita*'s most prominent hagiographical elements, such as the description of Alfred's chronic illness and Asser's praise for his devotion to prayer.<sup>113</sup> Despite all of these pressures, Asser writes that Alfred endeavoured to maintain a balance between his various interests and occupations, giving equal attention to his secular and religious responsibilities, in such a way that the king himself becomes a microcosm of all those living and working within his kingdom:

Interea tamen rex, inter bella et praesentis vitae frequentia impedimenta, necnon paganorum infestationes et cotidianas corporis infirmitates, et regni gubernacula regere, et omnem venandi artem agere, aurifices et artifices suos omnes et falconarios et accipitrarios canicularios quoque docere, et aedificia supra omnem antecessorum suorum consuetudinem venerabiliora et pretiosiora nova sua machinatione facere, et Saxonicos libros recitare, et maxime carmina Saxonica memoriter discere, aliis imperare, et solus assidue pro viribus studiosissime non designebat. Divina quoque ministeria et missam scilicet cotidie audire, psalmos quosdam et orationes et horas diurnas et nocturnas celebrare, et ecclesias nocturno tempore, ut diximus, orandi causa clam a suis adire solebat et frequentabat.<sup>114</sup>

110 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 30 (p. 25), and chap. 36 (pp. 27–28).

111 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 66 (p. 50).

112 We should, as Rory Naismith writes, recognize this as part of 'a much more prolonged process, rooted in developments that had begun long before he became king, and continuing well after 886'; see Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, pp. 105–24 (p. 119); also Keene, 'Alfred and London', pp. 243, 248.

113 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 74 (pp. 54–57).

114 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 76 (p. 59).

[Meanwhile however the king (amongst the wars and the frequent impediments of the present life, and also the viking attacks and his daily corporeal infirmities) did not fail in directing the governance of the kingdom, and performing all kinds of hunting, and instructing all of his goldsmiths and artisans, and his falconers, and hawkers, and dog-keepers, and making to his own design treasures which exceeded all those of the traditions of his forebears, and precious new treasures, and reciting from Saxon books, and above all learning by heart Saxon songs, and giving orders to his followers, and did this all alone assiduously to the utmost of his ability. He would also invariably listen to divine ministries and masses every day, and celebrate certain psalms and day-time and night-time offices, and would often go to churches in the night-time, as I have said, to pray alone without the knowledge of his house.]

This celebration of Alfred's attention to his religious obligations continues in some detail, paying special attention to the pains he took in maintaining a balance between secular and spiritual concerns.

This description also serves as a bridge between Asser's arrival at the West Saxon court, and Alfred's gift to him of the monasteries at Congresbury and Banwell. Following this digression from the historical narrative of the *Vita*, Chapter 82 plunges back into the action of 886, and the assault of the viking armies on the island of Paris, where they were repelled by the Franks.<sup>115</sup> Taking advantage of this lull in the action:<sup>116</sup>

Eodem anno Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, post incendia urbium stragesque populorum, Lundeniam civitatem honorifice restauravit et habitabilem fecit; quam genero suo Ætheredo, Merciorum comiti, commendavit servandam. Ad quem regem omnes Angli et Saxones, qui prius ubique dispersi fuerant aut cum paganis sub captivitate erant, voluntarie converterunt, et suo dominio se subdiderunt.<sup>117</sup>

[In that same year Alfred, the king of the Anglo-Saxons, after so many cities had been burned and people butchered, honorably restored and made habitable the city of London; he gave it into the care of his dependent Æthelred, the ealdorman of the Mercians. To King Alfred all of the Angles and Saxons, who previously had been everywhere dispersed and put to flight, and were not under the captivity of the pagans, voluntarily converted, and submitted themselves to his lordship.]

The refortification of the area within the Roman wall that apparently took place at this time, though unlikely to have been as rapid as Asser would have us believe, marked an important historical and conceptual milestone in Alfred's urban policy, and is archaeologically attested by numismatic evidence from the city.<sup>118</sup> From this point

115 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 82 (pp. 68–69).

116 There is no evidence in the text, as Keynes notes, that this move into London 'involved the exercise or display of force'; see Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', p. 21.

117 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 82 (p. 69).

118 Nelson, *Rulers and Ruling Families*, p. 154.



on, as Alice Sheppard writes, it was not necessarily the prominence of London's 'new architecture and material culture' that served to transform the city into an emblem of Alfred's power and influence, but rather the reclamation of the space itself for Wessex and Mercia, which endowed it with a special symbolic significance that endured throughout the period and beyond.<sup>119</sup> For Asser, as Tony Dyson has pointed out, this event marked the 'culmination' of Alfred's long campaign against the Danes, and no individual urban foundation subsequently receives greater attention in the *Vita*.<sup>120</sup>

This is not to say that Asser does not devote significant attention to Alfred's urban reforms after 886, and it is with this cornerstone in place that Asser's Alfred begins his programme of military and social reforms. Asser does not claim that Alfred was entirely successful in this, but then he also writes that these failures were not Alfred's, but rather the shortcomings of those who did not understand the need to work together for the common good:

Quid loquar de frequentibus contra paganos expeditionibus et bellis et incessabilibus regni gubernaculis? De cotidiana nationum, quae in Tyrreno mari usque ultimum Hiberniae finem habitant? Nam etiam de Hierosolyma ab Elia patriarcha epistolas et dona illi directas vidimus et legimus. De civitatibus et urbibus renovandis et aliis, ubi nunquam ante fuerant, construendis? De aedificiis aureis et argenteis incomparabiliter, illo edocente, fabricatis? De aulis et cambris regalibus, lapideis et ligneis suo iussu mirabiliter constructis? De villis regalibus lapideis antiqua positione motatis et in decentioribus locis regali imperio decentissime constructis? Qui maxima, excepto illo dolore, perturbatione et controversia suorum, qui nullum aut parvum voluntarie pro communi regni necessitate vellent subire laborem.<sup>121</sup>

[What can I say of his frequent expeditions and battles against the vikings, and the incessant responsibilities of government? Of his daily business with those nations which stretch from the Mediterranean Sea unto the ends of Ireland? For we have furthermore even seen and read letters and gifts to him from Jerusalem sent by the patriarch Elias. And also of the cities and towns renovated, and others constructed where before none had existed? Of treasures incomparably fashioned of gold and silver, at his instruction? Of royal palaces and chambers of stone and wood miraculously constructed at his decree? And of royal villas of stone, transported from their ancient position, and in more fitting places by his royal command most splendidly reconstructed? And what, leaving aside his personal suffering, of the mighty confusion and dispute of his people, who would undertake little or no work of their own volition for the common good of the kingdom.]

Asser's presentation of Alfred's governance makes all this seem rather like spinning plates. However, he does not criticize the king, but rather the disorder of his people,

119 Sheppard, 'The King's Family', p. 420.

120 Dyson, 'King Alfred and the Restoration of London', p. 100; see also discussion in Dyson and Schofield, 'Saxon London', p. 296.

121 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 91 (pp. 76–77).

whose reluctance to assist their lord is the source of their present discomfort. Molyneux, arguing that the later tenth century saw the formalization of systems only incipient during the reign of Alfred and his immediate successors, takes this as a sign that these works were not directed 'through a uniform administrative system, but through a series of contacts between the king and a variety of persons who could have compelled substantial numbers of subordinate peasants to work on royal construction projects'.<sup>122</sup> Special attention is devoted to their failure to contribute to the work of constructing and maintaining fortifications, and to describing how their enemies benefitted from this:

At si inter haec regalia exhortamenta propter pigritiam populi imperata non implentur, aut tarde incepta tempore necessitates ad utilitatem exercentium minus finita non provenirent, ut de castellis ab eo imperatis adhuc non inceptis loquar, aut nimium tarde inceptis ad perfectum finem non perductis, et hostiles copiae terra marique irrumperent, aut, ut saepe evenit, utraque parte, tunc contradictores imperialium diffinitionum inani poenitentia pene exinaniti verecundabantur... Sera igitur poenitentia nimium attriti poenitent, et regalia se praecepta incuriose despexisse dolent, et regalem sapientiam totis vocibus collaudant, et quod ante refutaverunt, totis viribus implere promittunt, id est de arcibus construendis et ceteris communibus communis regni utilitatibus.<sup>123</sup>

[But if, in the midst of these royal exhortations, these orders were not implemented on account of the indolence of the people, or, as they were begun late in a time of need, were not completed by the time they might be useful to those occupied in their construction — I am speaking of those fortifications commissioned by him which have not been initiated, or begun excessively late have not been brought to the point of completion — and a multitude of enemies burst in both by land and sea, or, as it often happens, by both on either hand, then those who had opposed these royal orders were humiliated in worthless penitence by being utterly laid waste... As a consequence those who were excessively punished are too lately repentant, and regret that they indifferently despised the royal precepts, and loudly praise the king's wisdom, and what they had refused before, they promise to make every effort to fulfill, that is regarding the construction of fortresses and other matters of communal use for the whole of the kingdom.]

This brings us full circle, returning to the same ideas that are reflected in the Burghal Hidage document, which describes a programme that had in many ways only just begun at the time of Alfred's death. Asser's view of the absolute necessity of these fortifications is laid plain here. Those who had ignored the king's commands, or

122 Molyneux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century*, p. 98, see also pp. 102–06 for the introduction of more highly developed processes in the reigns of later tenth-century rulers, particularly Edgar, whose 'innovations [...] were critical to the formation of the English kingdom as a territorial unit' (p. 231).

123 Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 91 (pp. 78–79).

who had been slow in beginning construction work, had reaped as they had sown. In the contexts of his *Vita* this is presented as no less than a deserved punishment for acting against the wishes of a king whose will is aligned with that of God himself. Asser's readers, as a result, may have thought that those who had suffered were experiencing the same divine retribution that had befallen numerous peoples in Scripture — those who had suffered the consequences of their transgressions. Their fate may also have been comparable with that of the British (discussed in Chapter 2), who had experienced the same humiliation at the hands of pagan barbarians — the same connection which, as we have seen, Wulfstan was to invoke once again in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* over a century later.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the burghal system would have been effectively supported by the kinds of literary productions which have been the focus of this chapter. Works like these may have played an active role in refashioning the perception of settlements and strongholds, and fostering new ideas about their function, that drew on literary traditions discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The *Andreas* poem of the Vercelli Book may have been created, in part, with the aim of stripping intramural spaces of the mythologies of ruin that they had developed from the settlement period onwards. Rather than simply standing as monuments and memorials to the ancient dead, these places had been reclaimed by the Church to provide sacred spaces for the religious practices that bound together Christian society.

Many of the texts written and translated either by Alfred or his successors demonstrate a vested interest in the relationship between the general populace and the system of fortified settlements and strongholds referred to in the Burghal Hidage document. This text, which stipulates the number of defenders required to defend these places, sets out in both symbolic and practical terms the relationship between the king, his strongholds, his people, and the lands they were defending. When considered in the context of the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, which exemplifies the Alfredian conception of intellectual and social hierarchy, and the Old English *Consolation*, which explains the role of a king in maintaining this balance, we can understand how the burhs themselves fitted into this framework, strengthening and reinforcing conceptions of lordship and kinship. When seen in this light the preface to the Old English *Soliloquies*, which describes the process by which the king constructed a home for himself out of trees of the forest, can be understood as more than simply a meditation upon the gathering of the wisdom of the Church Fathers. It also directly refers to the construction of buildings and towns, and encourages readers to follow the king's example, drawing parallels between the pursuit of intellectual, martial, and civic virtues.

Other evidence from literary texts such as the Herculean slaying of the Hydra in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and the later eleventh-century metrical epilogue to the Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica*, shows a similar interest in practical and intellectual endeavours, describing the actions and intentions of kings and their subjects in terms

that deal freely and confidently with metaphor and abstraction. Asser's *Vita Alfredi*, equally, shows us some of the ways in which Alfred tried and failed — apparently because of the shortcomings of his subjects — to institute some elements of his reforms, as well as the success he achieved in the 'capture' and refortification of the walled Roman city of London. However, the gap between the idea and the reality that is apparent in both Asser's *Vita* and the archaeological record, indicate that enthusiasm for Alfred's programme was far from universal at the time of his death. Whilst the reforms he had instituted saw change on an unprecedented scale, albeit sometimes in terms more conceptual than actual, the continuation and the development of these efforts in the tenth century was to be of enormous importance if they were to have any lasting impact on the settlement landscape.



## Spiritual Strongholds in Late-Saxon England

In the tenth and eleventh centuries attitudes towards settlements and strongholds that had been fostered under Alfred continued to exert their influence in the hands of his successors. However, there are few representations of towns and cities in vernacular literature that directly reflect the changes that settlements and strongholds underwent at this time, despite this being the period in which the majority of surviving Old English poetry was written down. The Israelite city-stronghold of Bethulia in *Judith*, I will argue, is an exception to this, and reveals the way in which some fortified sites of permanent settlement were operating in the late-Saxon landscape. This poem, thought by some to have been written with the aim of inspiring English audiences to take up arms against invaders, depicts the siege of an Israelite city by Assyrians in terms that evoke the image of a burh besieged by a viking army in the field. Works like *Judith* may have helped to cultivate a sense of the value and importance of these places, and especially the role that they were expected to play in the defence and advancement of the late-Saxon state.

Other literary works surviving from later contexts, though they do not reveal a great deal about the physical makeup of urban settlements, do nevertheless show how important they were in symbolic terms, and have a great deal to say about the importance of maintaining them as places of Christian community. In Old English poetry kings and other rulers who fail to fulfil this obligation frequently suffer as a consequence. Elsewhere, in homilies written at around the turn of the millennium, we see the influence of ideas similar to those discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, concerning the role of individuals as part of the structure of the universal Church. Concepts such as these, drawn from Scripture and other exegetical writing, had been central to the way in which Bede and Alfred presented their vision of settlements and society. Textual evidence suggests that by the end of the period they were no less than an integral part of late-Saxon ideology. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the early twelfth-century *Durham*, which depicts an urban foundation positioned at a point of balance between the natural and built environments, revealing a renewed sense of the relationship between the towns of Britain and their hinterlands, and their involvement within a wider European literary and cultural milieu.

This chapter places what might seem to be undue emphasis on ‘urban’ settlements, somewhat at odds with work in recent decades by archaeologists and historians on those transformations that took place in the tenth and eleventh centuries in rural contexts. This includes research on both high-status rural sites such as those at

Cheddar,<sup>1</sup> Goltho,<sup>2</sup> Portchester,<sup>3</sup> and Faccombe Netherton,<sup>4</sup> and on lower-status farming settlements which began, in the eleventh century to 'shift towards compact villages'.<sup>5</sup> The reasons for this urban focus are twofold. On the one hand, the textual evidence (and poetic evidence in particular), is especially relevant to our understanding of how urban places were conceptualized in the tenth century. As Blair notes, it was from 950 onwards that 'the hitherto diffuse landscapes of commercial and proto-urban activity crystallised into something that we can recognize as real towns'.<sup>6</sup> This, being the same period during which the four major poetic codices were compiled (and which produced the cultural and intellectual contexts in which Ælfric and Wulfstan were nurtured), makes discussion of cities in literary texts especially relevant to discussion of how they were understood in later-Saxon England. By contrast, rural settlements are once again much harder to find. As noted in earlier chapters, much of what I have had to say about ephemeral, lower-status buildings and settlements, may have been relevant to rural farming settlements at any point between the sixth and tenth centuries, before the shift to better-defined villages in the eleventh century.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the literary evidence would accord as readily with early settlements as it would with the tenth-century farmstead at Stotfold (Bedfordshire), which as Blair writes 'exemplifies a near-timeless mode, which could be found in Britain at any point between late prehistory and AD 1000'.<sup>8</sup>

It is more difficult to explain why higher-status rural settlements, secular and ecclesiastical, make little (if any) appearance in literature, despite their visibility elsewhere in other contemporary documents that show the link between settlements and status. These include the short works *Gehyncðo* and the *Rectitudines singularum personarum* (both dating to the early eleventh century), which describe the responsibilities of a thegn.<sup>9</sup> According to the former, the rights of a thegn were afforded to a cerol who 'hæfde fulllice fif hida ægenes landes, cirican 7 kycenan, bellhus 7 burhgeat, setl 7 sundernote on cynges healle' (had fully five hides of his own land, and church and kitchen, bell-house and burh-gate, a seat and office in the king's hall).<sup>10</sup> The *Rectitudines Singularum*, further reinforcing some of the responsibilities discussed in the previous chapter concerning individuals in positions of power, their dependents, and local infrastructure, indicates that a thegn should be responsible for 'fyrdfæreld 7 burhbote 7 brycgeweorc' (raising troops, building and repairing town walls, and maintaining bridges), in addition to maintaining hedges and performing other

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1 Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar*.

2 Beresford, *Goltho*.

3 Cunliffe, *Excavations at Portchester Castle*.

4 Fairbrother, *Faccombe Netherton*; also Blair, 'The Making of the English House'.

5 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 295.

6 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 311, also p. 338.

7 See discussion, pp. 60–73, 101–07.

8 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 295.

9 Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 60–62.

10 Liebermann, *Gesetze*, III, p. 456.



military obligations.<sup>11</sup> These works reflect increasingly defined relationships between settlements and social status that to some degree went beyond a simple division between town and countryside; there are clear parallels between *hagas* in towns, as Blair notes, and ‘the enclosed homesteads of aristocrats and successful *ceorlas*’ with their ‘halls, kitchens, and gates, that were starting to appear in the countryside.’<sup>12</sup> An enhanced understanding of the relationship between high-status rural sites and their counterparts in towns might encourage us to think differently about the apparent invisibility of the former in literary sources. Perhaps, rather than assuming their absence, we should instead consider the possibility that what these texts have to say about the symbolic significance of apparently ‘urban’ places was equally relevant to high-status settlements in the countryside. Churches offer a parallel. The smallest of local churches acted as an extension of the seat of the local bishopric, and in itself embodied the symbolism of the cathedral, the Temple of Jerusalem, and Heavenly Jerusalem. Similarly embodying the duties of a thegn and his ultimate responsibilities to his king, a high-status settlement in the countryside might serve as a microcosm of the same properties encapsulated in the idea and the ideal of the City.

## Bethulia as Burh in the Old English *Judith*

The reign of Alfred’s successor, Edward the Elder (c. 899–924) was characterized by the continuation and development of the various institutions reformed or implemented by his father. Where the burhs were concerned, however, it was not Alfred but Edward who recognised the potential of this system ‘for aggression, conquest and settlement’.<sup>13</sup> The tenth and eleventh centuries saw a gradual increase in occupation and urbanisation in some of the places identified as burhs, though this was not the case with all, and the chronology of their development is neither linear nor straightforward.<sup>14</sup> A common error is to assume a grand narrative of steady progression towards urbanisation, perhaps stemming from a desire to see cities as the yardstick of human achievement. In the latter half of the tenth and the eleventh century, there is archaeological evidence that occupation in towns like London, Winchester, York, Worcester, Norwich, Lincoln, and Canterbury became more concentrated, as kings like Edgar and his heirs developed ‘a high and uniform degree of authority on the core part of their territory, stretching from the south coast to Yorkshire’.<sup>15</sup> Elites invested in urban development fostered ‘urban growth for the economic rewards which towns could generate’, to the extent that the infrastructure inherited by William the Conqueror ‘was still developing, but [ ... ] was recognizably a framework for later medieval urban growth’.<sup>16</sup> In places like Gloucester, however, attempts to promote the development of an early tenth-century burh into

11 Liebermann, *Gesetze*, III, p. 444.

12 Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 342; also Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, pp. 172–73.

13 Abels, ‘Alfred the Great, the *micel Hæden* Here and the Viking Threat’, p. 279.

14 Vince, ‘Saxon Urban Economies’, pp. 112–14; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 334–38.

15 Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, p. 180.

16 Hall, ‘Burhs and Boroughs’, p. 615; also Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 385–87.

a flourishing town were initially ineffective.<sup>17</sup> Settlement in towns was encouraged in part by commercial legislation, with Edward's laws stipulating that all trade (over a certain value) was to be confined to towns, where it could be observed 'by officials and other trustworthy witnesses'.<sup>18</sup> One striking development that would help to facilitate the recapture of land lost to the Danes was the use of burhs in ways that were comparable to Alfred's plan for Wessex. This process, according to the *Mercian Register*, took place over the period 907–921, and was conducted by Edward in collaboration with Æthelraed the Ealdorman of Mercia and his wife Æthelflaed — Alfred's daughter and Edward's sister.<sup>19</sup> These strongholds established strategic footholds from which Edward and Æthelflaed (who took the reins following her husband's death c. 911), were able to lead a combined force of West Saxon and Mercian troops in an assault on viking centres of power in 918 that saw the East Midlands revert to the control of what was for the first time being promoted as an 'Anglo-Saxon' kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

A Mercian stronghold that was the focus of significant reconstruction in the early tenth century was the former Roman town of *Deva* (Chester), which had come under threat from vikings 'in the Wirral and south-west Northumbria' after their expulsion from Dublin c. 902, and whose presence had prompted Æthelflaed to refortify it in 907.<sup>21</sup> At this time Chester was sparsely occupied, having been described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 893, following a viking raid, as 'a deserted city in the Wirral'.<sup>22</sup> However, as Alan Thacker has observed, Chester was to prove of enormous strategic and economic importance to the Mercians and West Saxons, lying as it did beside a direct route between the Norse kingdoms of Dublin and York, and becoming 'the focus of complex garrisoning arrangements monitoring an important frontier area'.<sup>23</sup> As David Griffiths writes, this was followed by the establishment of further burhs in north-western Mercia at Eddisbury (914) and Runcorn (915) during Æthelflaed's lifetime (d. 918), although the continuation of this process once Edward had assumed control of Mercia, and establishment of further fortifications (Thelwall and Manchester in 919, and *Cledemutha*, 'probably Rhuddlan', in 921), suggests that they were thought similarly important in the eyes of Wessex.<sup>24</sup>

One episode of potential relevance to this process, and specifically to the refortification of Chester, is found in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, dated to the

17 See discussion in Bintley, 'The Translation of St Oswald's Relics to New Minster, Gloucester'.

18 Jones, 'Transaction Costs, Institutional Change, and the Emergence of a Market Economy', p. 673. See also discussion of later continuity and development under Æthelstan in Hill, 'Æthelstan's Urban Reforms'.

19 Griffiths, 'The North-West Mercian Burhs', p. 75. On the strength of this collaboration, see Wainwright, 'Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians', p. 46.

20 Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 25–26.

21 Ward, 'Edward the Elder and the Re-establishment of Chester', p. 160.

22 Thacker, 'The Early Medieval City and Its Buildings', pp. 16–17; Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, p. 42; Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 128–30, 167–68; Rahtz, 'The Archaeology of West Mercian Towns', p. 109.

23 Thacker, 'The Early Medieval City', p. 17; Griffiths, 'The North-West Mercian Burhs', p. 83; see also Maddicott, 'Trade, Industry, and the Wealth of King Alfred', p. 41.

24 Griffiths, 'The North-West Mercian Burhs', p. 75.

eleventh century by Joan Radner,<sup>25</sup> which preserves a 'rare narrative account ... of the defence of a fortification during a siege', assigned by the chronicler to the time of Æthelflaed.<sup>26</sup> The value of this episode as evidence for burhs in action against viking assault has recently been supported by Ryan Lavelle, despite the presence of 'fantastical' elements in the narrative.<sup>27</sup> Margaret Gelling's summary of what had happened to this particular group of Norwegians after their expulsion from Dublin has the familiar ring of vikings seeking an advantage through negotiation:

Ingimund and his Norse followers left Dublin and tried to establish themselves in north-west Wales, but were expelled by the Welsh king, Clydog. After this they arrived in north-west Mercia and entered into negotiations with Æthelflaed. She gave them lands near Chester, but her tolerance of their presence broke down when they desired to occupy the city. Æthelflaed assembled an army and defended Chester successfully...<sup>28</sup>

Whether or not these events took place, or took place in the manner described, they illustrate the importance of places like Chester at this time as increasingly powerful symbolic statements in the landscape.

It is probably no coincidence that the Old English *Judith* is thought by some to have been produced at around this time, given that the poem depicts a burh besieged by foreign invaders who are defeated by the effective counterattack of its garrison. *Judith* appears in MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv, a codex dated by Ker 'to between the last quarter of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh'.<sup>29</sup> This puts its compilation at some point during the reigns of Edward the Martyr (975–978) and Æthelred (978–1016), shortly before England came under Danish control. The dating of the poem itself, and its dialect, remain typically uncertain, although the relationship between the two is integral, with Griffith writing that 'if it is WS, it is likely to be late (i.e. late ninth or tenth century); if it is Anglian, it may be earlier, but it is impossible to say how much earlier'.<sup>30</sup> Other aspects of the poem may indicate a date of composition as some point between the late ninth or tenth centuries, although as Griffith notes, this conclusion can only be tentative.<sup>31</sup>

Numerous commentators have suggested that the poem's portrayal of Holofernes' death at the hands of a virtuous and chaste Judith may have been taken as a call to arms against the Danes who were besieging burhs and (symbolically) laying

25 Radner, 'Writing History'.

26 Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p. 230.

27 Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars*, p. 230. Margaret Gelling similarly considered it 'a reliable source in spite of having been infiltrated by a great deal of folklore'; see Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 130; also Wainwright, 'Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians', p. 46.

28 Gelling, *The West Midlands*, p. 130. This episode from Radner, *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 169–73.

29 *Judith*, ed. by Griffith, p. 1.

30 *Judith*, ed. by Griffith, p. 44.

31 *Judith*, ed. by Griffith, p. 47. Timmer put the dating on metrical grounds at 'round about 930, but before 937', in *Judith*, ed. by Timmer, p. 10.

siege to Mercia and Wessex.<sup>32</sup> The idea has also long been discussed that the poem might have been composed with direct reference to Æthelflaed herself, though this possibility has generally been discounted on the grounds that there is no evidence that ‘poems were written about religious figures which symbolized historical figures’.<sup>33</sup> Leaving this rather general claim aside, one should note that that *Judith* need not have been written with direct reference to Æthelflaed for it to have called to mind her actions. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that this poem could have been recited in the early tenth century without this being the case, even if it was not written about her, and even if she had largely drifted from popular memory by the time it was written down. As Karma Lochrie has argued, emphasizing the rhetorical potential of the poem, its ‘clear political purpose’ is ‘to inspire the English to rise up against the Danes.’<sup>34</sup> The ‘historical and political urgency’ of the work ‘would not have been lost on the Anglo-Saxons’, as it has been by modern readers who ‘ignore the political and historical implications.’<sup>35</sup> Lochrie is quite right in noting that the discrepancy between historical and allegorical approaches to the poem ‘is a question about methods of reading’; there is no reason why the poem may not be read in its historical contexts as well as for its spiritual message, and the two approaches may usefully complement one another.<sup>36</sup>

The opening lines of the poem have probably been lost (in unknown circumstances), and thus the reader joins the action at the point Holofernes issues a summons to a feast which is more or less entirely alcoholic. His retainers, apparently in attendance under duress, are then plied with drink to the point of insensibility, as cups and bowls of drink are passed around the benches.

Swa se inwidda ofer ealne dæg  
dryhtguman sine drencte mid wine,  
swiðmod sinces brytta, oðþæt hie on swiman lagon,  
oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegne,  
agotene goda gehwylces.

[So throughout the day the evil one, that arrogant dispenser of treasure soaked his men with wine, until they lay in a swoon, the entirety of his veteran troop as sozzled as if they had been struck dead, bereft of any sense.]

(*Judith* 28–32)

Hugh Magennis has noted that the excessive drinking of Holofernes and the Assyrian warriors is characteristic of the heavy drinking that was criticised by later ecclesiastical

32 Lucas, ‘*Judith* and the Woman Hero’, p. 26; Magennis, ‘Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*’, p. 12.

33 *Judith*, ed. by Timmer, pp. 6–8; Pringle, ‘“*Judith*”: The Homily and the Poem’, p. 83.

34 Lochrie, ‘Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Politics of War’, p. 2; see also de Lacy, ‘Aspects of Christianisation and Cultural Adaptation in the Old English *Judith*’, pp. 406–07.

35 Lochrie, ‘Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Politics of War’, p. 3.

36 Lochrie, ‘Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Politics of War’, p. 3.

authors.<sup>37</sup> Instead of playing an appropriate role as a lord of men, Holofernes presides over a feast scene that is 'the very opposite of joy and dignity', wholly lacking in the 'ordered courtesy of the *Beowulf* feasts', and characterised by 'uproar and excess'.<sup>38</sup> This spirit of drunken abandon was seen as a contributing factor in the murder of Archbishop Ælfheah by the author of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 1012:

Pa on þone Sæternesdæg wearð swiðe gestured se here on gean þone biscop, forþan þe he nolde heom nan feoh behaten and forbead þet man nan þing wið him syllan ne moste; wæron hi eac swyðe druncene, forþam þær wæs gebroht win sudan.<sup>39</sup>

[Then on the Saturday that army became greatly annoyed with that bishop, because he did not with them to be given any goods, and he forbid that any man should give anything for him. They were also very drunken, because wine had been brought there from the south.]

Whilst Holofernes and the Assyrians are presented as the image of an 'archetypal Germanic lord surrounded by his loyal retainers', it is nevertheless clear that he and his troops are sinful invaders, and deserve to be treated as such.<sup>40</sup> Correspondingly, scholars have frequently noted that Judith herself is not presented as the beguiling temptress of Scripture,<sup>41</sup> but rather as a heroine serving in the role of a female *miles Christi*, who embodies the virtues of chastity and moral fortitude that were promoted in contemporary society.<sup>42</sup> The beheading of Holofernes therefore serves as an example to the poem's audience to 'follow her example and confront, with comparable courage, the invading Danes'.<sup>43</sup>

With these opposed images of Holofernes and Judith in mind, the same juxtaposition can also be seen between the places they represent in the poem's landscape. In the case of the Assyrians this is an encampment outside the walls of Bethulia, the Israelite stronghold. This place and setting could have been understood in terms of a siege encampment near a burh, like the fortifications established by vikings during the siege of Rochester in 885.<sup>44</sup> However, the Assyrian camp is not described in terms which indicate that it should be thought of as a well-defended camp. Except for the pavilion of Holofernes, the poet tells us very little about it. There is certainly a central place in which the Assyrians are gathered together to drink, where those 'fletsittende' (hall-sitters (literally 'floor-sitters'), 19, 33) evidently accustomed to drinking in halls pass cups and bowls 'æfter bencum' (around the benches, 18). However, the only structure that might reasonably be called a building is the 'gystern' (guest-chamber,

37 Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 52; see also discussion in Magennis, 'The Cup as Symbol and Metaphor in Old English Literature'; Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, pp. 103–10.

38 Magennis, 'Adaptation of Biblical Detail in the Old English *Judith*', p. 331.

39 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS. E*, ed. by Irvine, p. 69.

40 Magennis, 'Adaptation of Biblical Detail in the Old English *Judith*', p. 335.

41 Magennis, 'Adaptation of Biblical Detail in the Old English *Judith*', p. 333.

42 Chance, *Woman as Hero*, pp. 33, 38–52. See also discussion in Lucas, 'Judith and the Woman Hero'; Magennis, 'Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*'; and Klein, *Ruling Women*, p. 106.

43 Astell, 'Holofernes's Head', p. 119.

44 *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. by Stevenson, chap. 66 (pp. 49–50).

40) in which Judith is held before she is brought to Holofernes' pavilion, although it is difficult to say much about this with any certainty.<sup>45</sup> It is unlikely (though not impossible) that the Assyrians have gone to the trouble of building a permanent structure, and more likely that the term is being used ironically — that this *gystern* is no more a building in any real sense than Judith is a *gyst*. The Assyrian camp is not much of a camp at all in any structural sense, and although it houses plenty of warriors, the conditions in which they are living in the field are decidedly unclear.

Their leader himself, who is described as a 'burga ealdor' (lord of strongholds, 58) certainly seems to be in the wrong place, though his aim is, of course, to add another stronghold to his collection. The feature of the Assyrian camp to have attracted the most critical attention is Holofernes' pavilion. From the guest chamber Judith is led 'to træfe þam hean' (to that high pavilion, 43), within which Holofernes has his own 'burgeteld' (private chamber, 57, 248, 276), where a golden curtain conceals his bed:

Ðær wæs eallgylden  
fleohnet fæger ond ymbe þæs folctogan  
bed ahongen, þæt se bealofulla  
mihte wlitan þurh, wigena baldor,  
on æghwylcne þe ðær inne come  
hæleða bearna, on hyne nænig  
monna cynnes, nymðe se modiga hwæne  
niðe rofra him þe near hete  
rinca to rune gegangan.

[In that place there was a beautiful all-golden fly-net, hung about the bed of that leader of men, so that the baleful one, that one bold amongst his men, might peer through on each one who came therein of the sons of men; but upon him none of mankind (might look), unless that brave man summoned near to him one of his infamous warriors to come to counsel.]

(*Judith* 46–54)

This net functions as yet another means for Holofernes to control his men, and is hung 'in such a way as to allow the commander to have a better view of his visitors than they have of him, unless he summons them to his bed'.<sup>46</sup> It lies at the heart of the private chamber within the pavilion that his men are too timid to enter even as the full force of the Israelite army falls upon them.

45 Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 496. Garner appears to conflate the place in which Holofernes invites his men to drink (and where they fall asleep drunk), with the tent in which his bed is surrounded by a net, where he is beheaded by Judith; see Garner, *Structuring Spaces*, pp. 88–104. These spaces are distinct — Holofernes' men cannot be within this space, as it is essential to the poem's grim humour that they are afraid to enter into his *burgeteld* when the camp is under attack by the Israelites.

46 Robinson, 'Five Textual Notes on the Old English *Judith*', p. 48.

The centrality of the pavilion and the general's private chamber is starkly contrasted with Bethulia, just as Holofernes is contrasted with Judith. Bethulia in this sense serves as a straightforward symbol of the heavenly city, whilst the Assyrian camp and the 'wyrmsele' (worm-hall, 119) and 'heolstram ham' (dark home, 121) into which Holofernes is cast *post mortem* are hellish in both a symbolic and a literal sense.<sup>47</sup> The city of the Israelites is not, however, depicted as 'an arid, dusty, water-starved city huddled away in the hills of the Middle East'; instead, the poet makes an attempt to resituate the history of *Judith* as part of the 'local history' of a contemporary English audience, recognizable in their own landscape.<sup>48</sup> Bethulia is first glimpsed when Judith returns home from the Assyrian camp, shining in the distance in 'striking contrast to Holofernes' newfound home in hell'.<sup>49</sup>

Eodon ða gegnum þanonne  
 þa idese ba, ellenþriste,  
 oðþæt hie becomon, collenferhðe,  
 eadhreðige mægð, ut of ðam herige,  
 þæt hie sweotollice geseon mihten  
 þære wlitegan byrig weallas blican,  
 Bethuliam. Hie ða beahhrodene  
 feðelaste forð onettan,  
 oð hie glædmode gegan hæfdon  
 to ðam wealgate.

[From there both of the women went forth, heroically bold, until they emerged, stouthearted, triumphant maidens, out of that army, so that they might see clearly the walls of that beautiful city, Bethulia, shining. Then those ring-adorned ones hurried forth on the track, until they had gone, glad in mind, up to that wall-gate.]

(*Judith* 132–41)

The effects of this passage as the action develops are pleasantly cinematic for the modern reader, following Judith and her handmaiden steadily 'ut of ðam herige' (away from that army) and on their way back to Bethulia, presumably still under cover of darkness, as the Israelite attack on the Assyrian camp comes at first light 'of ðære haligan byrig on ðæt dægred sylf' (from out of that holy city at the dawning of the day itself, 203–04). Interestingly, this description of Bethulia's walls either implies that they are luminescent in their own right, or that they must in some way reflect the light of the moon and stars. This phrase invites immediate comparison between Bethulia and heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>50</sup> and its use elsewhere in Old English literature is well known in contexts where it indicates aesthetic beauty. In this instance I would

47 Hermann, 'The Theme of Spiritual Warfare', pp. 6–7.

48 Hermann, 'The Theme of Spiritual Warfare', p. 7.

49 Astell, 'Holofernes's Head', p. 129.

50 Hermann, 'The Theme of Spiritual Warfare', pp. 6–7.



go further, however, and suggest that the ‘shining’ quality of these walls may also have been understood in a more literal sense by a contemporary audience. There are grounds here to suggest that Bethulia would either have been identified, like Mermedonia, with one of the many walled Roman towns or forts found throughout the landscape of early medieval England, or it could equally have been associated with one of the new burghal foundations like Oxford, where the archaeological evidence indicates that the earth and timber rampart may have been faced with stone at around this time.<sup>51</sup>

An exchange takes place between Judith and the guardians of the ‘wealles geat’ (gate of the wall, 151), before she and her handmaiden are permitted entry to display Holofernes’ head. In this scene Bethulia is presented in a way that inverts the effect of Holofernes’ pavilion and its place within the Assyrian camp. Whereas only Holofernes can see out through the net surrounding his bed, the walls of Bethulia and the city gate invert this relationship. Here, it is the guardians on the walls and the people within who are looking out from within the intramural space, and they are the ones who are called upon to lend their strength to the destruction of their mutual enemy. Whilst the Assyrian camp is held together only at its head, which has been severed from the body by Judith in more than one sense, this is not the case with Bethulia, which is presented as a communal space for communal action, within which it is the people who are empowered:

Ða wurdon bliðe burhsittende,  
 syððan hi gehyrdon hu seo halige spræc  
 ofer heanne weall. Here wæs on lustum;  
 wið þæs fæstengeates folc onette,  
 wera wif somod, wornum ond heapum,  
 ðreatum ond ðrymmum þrungeon ond urnon  
 on geardaga þeodnes mægð þusendmælum,  
 ealde ge geonge. Æghwylcum wearð  
 men on ðære medobyrig mod areted,  
 syððan hie ongeaton þæt wæs Iudith cumen  
 eft to eðle, ond ða ofostlice  
 hie mid eaðmedum in forleton.

[Then the occupants of the city were joyful, after they heard how that holy one spoke over the high wall. The army was in a state of rejoicing; that people hurried to the gate of that fortress, men and women together, in crowds and masses, troops and hosts, they surged and pushed forward to the Lord’s maiden in their thousands, both old and young. The spirit of each of the men in that mead-town was raised, once they perceived that Judith had come back to her homeland, and then quickly they let her in with reverence.]

(*Judith* 159–70)

51 Dodd, ed., *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 21, 140–52.

This is probably the most sustained positive description in Old English poetry of the relationship between a fortified burh and its inhabitants, and following this exchange, with Judith still apparently outside the walls at this point, all manner of citizens, young and old, male and female, emerge from the city buildings and throng towards the gates.<sup>52</sup> Following Judith's call to arms, and with the full force of Bethulia and its inhabitants directed against them, the leaderless Assyrians are utterly doomed. With the coming of the dawn, the Israelites advance out of the town to crush the Assyrians. The terms used to describe Bethulia here are carefully chosen; it is both a 'medoburh' (mead-town, 167), a place thus rightly bound together by positive drinking and oaths-swearing, and a 'haligan byrig' (holy town, 203). Once the Israelites have defeated the Assyrians it is a 'beorhtan byrig' (bright town, 326) to which they return, presenting Judith with Holofernes' armour as a token of her victory.<sup>53</sup> Through this final epithet, the poet draws together its combined virtues as a place of spiritual, physical, and communal strength.

In this way, Bethulia is presented as an archetype of the sort of burh that had been promoted under Alfred, perhaps drawing on earlier precedents, which had proved integral to the defence of Wessex in the ninth century, and to the advancement of West Saxon and Mercian power in the tenth. What we see again are many of the same elements that we saw in the last chapter, both in *Andreas*, where a burh liberated from the clutches of Satan becomes a place of good Christian community, and again in the translations, prefaces, and other works which had emphasized the importance of societal cohesion to the maintenance and development of the burghal system.

### Cities of Good and Evil in *Elene*, *Juliana*, and *Daniel*

Not all Old English texts that refer to urban settlements reveal much about their physical makeup, nor the way in which they operated in a military or socio-economic sense. The next part of this chapter considers three works which, though they may not have been written in the tenth century, were preserved in tenth century manuscripts. The argument I put forward does not directly seek to relate these works to any particular historical moment, as I have done in the case of *Andreas* and *Judith*. Instead, focusing on three texts, it identifies a common approach to the use of divinely sanctioned power, and the manner in which this power is related to authority over urban strongholds. In this way, I suggest that these texts reflect the maintenance and perpetuation of a set of attitudes that were demonstrably relevant and important at the time they were copied and included in manuscripts.

The first of these is Jerusalem in the *Elene* poem of the Vercelli Book (c. 975). The 'thematic statement' at the heart of this poem, which Catharine Regan has identified

52 A motif also common to *Juliana* and *Andreas*, as noted in Talentino, "Causing City Walls to Resound", pp. 189–90.

53 Magennis, 'Adaptation of Biblical Detail in the Old English *Judith*', p. 336.

as ‘the Cross, the Church, and its mission’, suggests that its author, Cynewulf, was probably working in connection with an ecclesiastical institution.<sup>54</sup> Gradon considered *Elene* most likely to have been composed by Cynewulf in Mercia during the first half of the ninth century, on the basis of ‘occasional’ Mercian forms and metrical evidence in the epilogue.<sup>55</sup> As Nicholas Howe noted, it is Rome that serves as the ‘central pivot’ in *Elene*.<sup>56</sup> This is certainly true in the context of Howe’s argument, which argues that Rome was the ‘capital’ of early medieval England — not in the sense of an ‘established political seat of a nation-state’, but in a more purely ‘etymological sense as the head (*caput*) or chief city of a culture.’<sup>57</sup> Rome in *Elene*, as in its likely sources, is the place to and from which Constantine and Helena travel, and in the context of the poem it appears as a halfway point between Jerusalem and Britain.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, neither Rome nor Jerusalem, nor indeed any other town or city, is presented in anything other than abstract terms — there is no physical description of the ‘city’ itself. The appearance of these places, on the whole, is primarily to indicate the status of individuals or groups. A prime example can be found in the description of Constantine’s triumphant return to the unidentified strongholds under his authority:

Gewat þa heriga helm ham eft þanon  
 hupe hremig — hild wæs gesceaden —  
 wigge geweorðod. Com þa wigena hleo  
 þegna þreate þryðbord stenan,  
 beadurow cyning burga neosan.

[That helm of warriors then went back home from there, exulting in his booty — the combat had been settled — the war had been won. The protector of warriors came with a troop of men, whose strong shields resounded, the battle-brave king to seek out his cities.]

(*Elene* 148–52)

54 Regan, ‘Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf’s *Elene*’, p. 252; *The Poems of Cynewulf*, trans. by C. W. Kennedy, p. 12.

55 *Cynewulf’s ‘Elene’*, ed. by Gradon, p. 23. Irvine also thinks it most likely that Cynewulf worked during the ninth century; see Irvine, ‘Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems’, p. 42. Anderson cautiously suggests that Cynewulf may have been working in the ‘eighth or ninth or maybe as late as the tenth century’; see Anderson, *Cynewulf*, p. 23. For further discussion advocating a date later in the period, see Fulk, ‘Cynewulf’; and Conner, ‘On Dating Cynewulf’, pp. 46–47.

56 Howe, ‘Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England’, p. 163.

57 Howe, ‘Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England’, p. 155.

58 Whilst *Elene* relies heavily upon its source, the *Acta Cyriaci*, areas of invention within the poem such as Constantine’s battle and Helena’s sea voyage are generally the sort of developments that appealed to the tastes of Cynewulf’s contemporaries; see *Cynewulf’s Elene*, ed. by Gradon, pp. 15, 20; *Cynewulf, Elene*, ed. by Kent, p. 7; *The Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. by Kennedy, p. 35; Schaar, *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group*, p. 25; Calder, ‘The Vision of Paradise’, p. 111. Jackson Campbell notes that *Elene*’s closest relative is a short Latin story known in the earliest manuscripts as the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* rather than the *Acta Cyriaci*; see Campbell, ‘Cynewulf’s Multiple Revelations’, p. 230.

In this passage these burhs indicate the status of Constantine, and are as essential to his martial role as his troop of warriors and his victories in battle.<sup>59</sup> In every other respect, however, they are featureless. The same terms are used to describe him later in the poem, when Helena fetches a wise man to help her decide what to do with the nails that had pierced Christ, at which point she is told that she should:

...ðas næglas hat  
 þam æðlestan eorðcyninga  
 burgagenda, on his bridels don  
 meare to midlum.

[...bid the noblest of earthly kings and ruler of cities to put these nails on his bridle as a bit for his horse.]

(*Elene* 1172–75)

The divine power of these nails ensures Constantine's victory in battle, like Excalibur, the sword of Peleus, and other legendary weapons imbued with magical properties. Once again, it is notable that the reference to burhs here only seems intended to serve as a mark of Constantine's temporal and earthly power, like his status as a ruler over earthly kings.<sup>60</sup>

Further references to Rome, Jerusalem, and other unnamed towns do little to develop our impression of what they looked like, or how they may have been imagined by Cynewulf and his readers. Once Helena has arrived in Jerusalem, she summons the five hundred wise men who are best versed in law, whom Cynewulf describes as 'ceastre weardas' (guardians of the city, 382–84), primarily to berate them for their ignorance. She wields a similar power to her son, if only by extension. When she instructs these city-guardians to decide which of them will be responsible for answering her questions, Cynewulf bolsters her authority by describing her as 'bald in burgum' (strong within the cities, 412). In the action that follows, Helena's dialogue with the indignant and recalcitrant wise man Judas leads to the discovery of the cross itself, or at least it does once Judas has been starved into submission at the bottom of a well. Once the cross has been revealed, the power of Helena (and Constantine) over what will become Christendom leads to the circulation of this knowledge throughout the realms within the Emperor's power:

Da wæs gefrege in þære folcsceare,  
 geond þa werpeode wide læded  
 mære morgenspel manigum on andan  
 þara þe drythnes æ dyrnan woldon,

59 As John Hermann noted, many of Cynewulf's narrative developments 'can best be understood in terms of the merging of the heroic ethos of OE poetry with the biblical and patristic notion of the spiritual combat'; see Hermann, 'The Theme of Spiritual Warfare', p. 115.

60 As Gordon Whatley notes, this area of the poem is 'the most extensive piece of amplification in the whole work', designed to impress upon the listener Constantine's power and authority in no uncertain terms; see Whatley, 'The Figure of Constantine the Great in Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 162.

boden æfter burgum swa brimo fæðmað  
 in ceastra gehwære þæt Cristes rod  
 fyn foldan begræfen funden wære...

[Then there was learned amongst the people, and throughout the nation widely made known, a great piece of news in the morning, to the horror of many of those who wished to keep the Lord's law hidden. It was announced throughout the strongholds that the ocean embraces, in every city that Christ's cross, long buried in the earth, had been found ...]

(*Elene* 967–73)

Once again, the settlements and strongholds mentioned here, be they *ceaster* or *burh*, do not offer the listener well-defined images of particular places. Despite this, they are presented as places where people are brought together so that the good news can be disseminated centrally by figures with royal authority. This alone draws attention to the function of urban environments as places for the circulation of knowledge. Following Helena's orders for a bridle to be manufactured for her son using nails from the True Cross, Jerusalem appears once more in her final commands to the 'seleste mid Iudeum gumena wiste, hæleda cynnes' (one of the Jews whom she knew to be the best of men and of mankind, 1201–03), whom she orders 'to þære halgan byrig cuman in þa ceastre' (to come into the holy fortress, into the city, 1203–05). The symbolism of both this act, and of the holy city, is straightforward, drawing attention to Helena's role as a prefiguration of the Church ushering repentant sinners not only into the physical and temporal city of Jerusalem, but also back into the City of God.

Jane Chance has suggested this may also be the case in *Judith* and *Juliana*, both of whose eponymous heroines can be seen as figures of Ecclesia returning sinners to the embrace of the Church.<sup>61</sup> Cynewulf's apparent disinterest in the physical fabric of urban places is equally apparent in *Juliana*, in which they again appear primarily to enhance the status of a powerful figure, in this case the Emperor Maximian, persecutor of Christians. At the beginning of the poem, following his commands, 'foron æfter burgum, swa he biboden hæfde, þegnas þryðfulle' (hostile soldiers passed through the cities, as he had bidden, 11–12).<sup>62</sup> The scene then shifts to focus on one of his governors within these strongholds, Juliana's persecutor Eleusius, who 'rondburgum weold, eard weardade oftast symle in þære ceastre Commedia' (ruled over fortified cities, most often kept residence in the city of Nicomedia, 19–21). In contrast with Constantine and Helena's exercise of power, both of these descriptions show how the moral decrepitude of those responsible for government infiltrates the places under their control.

Cynewulf's most useful contribution to our understanding of how evil corrupts individuals, in the same way it corrupts institutions, is found later in this poem,

61 Chance, *Woman as Hero*, p. 37.

62 All references to *Juliana* from *The Exeter Anthology*, ed. by Muir, pp. 188–214.

during the dialogue between Juliana and Satan himself. Here, Satan tells her how he makes his assaults on the weaknesses of individuals, in much the same way that an army makes an attack on a fortress:

Ic þæs wealles geat  
ontyne þurh teonan; bið se torr þyrel,  
ingong geopenad, þonne ic ærest him  
þurh eargfare in onsende  
in breostsefan bitre geþoncas  
þurh mislice modes willan...

[I open that gate of the wall by means of an injury; once there is a way into that tower, an entry-way opened up, then I first by means of a flight of arrows send bitter thoughts into his spirit, through various wishes of the heart.]

(*Juliana* 401–06)

The allegory of the soul as fortress is well established elsewhere in Scripture, and also appears in *Vainglory*, as James Doubleday noted.<sup>63</sup> The image Satan presents is that of a fortress rather than a settlement — a solitary tower that evokes the individual standing alone against a barrage of missiles, rather than a group of people banded together with common purpose. In Juliana's final address to the people of Nicomedia before her execution she counters this skilfully, transforming Satan's representation of the military tower under armed assault into that of a house battered by winds and storms:

Forþon ic, leof weorud, læran wille,  
æfremmende, þæt ge eower hus  
gefæstnige, þy læs hit ferblædum  
windas toweorpan. Weal sceal þy trumra  
strong wiþstondan storma scurum,  
leahtra gehydgum.

[Therefore I, beloved people, wish to teach you, piously, that you should make fast your house, lest with sudden gusts of the winds it should be cast down. A steadfast wall shall all the more strongly resist the blasts of storms, the thoughts of sinful things.]

(*Juliana* 647–52)

In this way Juliana confronts Satan's image of the tower with that of a building that can be seen as decidedly more domestic — as a place for home and family, rather than a military garrison — and thus an image better suited to appeal to a contemporary audience's sense of Christian community. By doing this, Juliana instructs her listeners, they shall find their way to the 'wuldres byrig' (wondrous city, 665), heavenly Jerusalem, unimpeded by the corruption of Satan.

63 Doubleday, 'The Allegory of the Soul as Fortress in Old English Poetry'.

Completing this idea, Eleusius and his men subsequently doom themselves to a dwelling place in hell, following the ill-fated sailing expedition in which they are shipwrecked (675–82). The city of Nicomedia for which Eleusius had been responsible, on the other hand, undergoes a triumphant spiritual rebirth as the body of Juliana is borne within its walls. By the time we reach the end of the poem, before Cynewulf's closing appeal to the grace of God, her remains have already taken on the symbolism of holy relics:

Ungelice wæs  
læded lofsongum lic haligre  
micle mægne to moldgræfe,  
þæt hy hit gebrohton burgum in innan,  
sidfolc micel. Ðær siððan wæs  
gearsongum godes lof hafen  
þrymme micle oþ þisne dæg  
mid þeodscipe.

[In a wholly different manner the body of the holy one was led with songs of praise by a great multitude to the earth-grave, so that they brought it into the city, that vast throng of people. Since that time, as the years pass, the praise of God has been raised up there with great glory unto this day amongst that nation.]

(*Juliana* 688–94)

This act, like the 'baptism' of Mermedonia, serves to sanctify Nicomedia and transform it into a place of Christian community, in such a way that the city becomes a *figura* of heavenly Jerusalem. From this point onwards, Cynewulf is telling us, Nicomedia has become a stronghold not only of good men and their righteous deeds, but also — more importantly — of God.

In this respect, *Juliana* shares at least one important feature with *Daniel*, contained in the late tenth-century Junius Manuscript.<sup>64</sup> This poem begins with the sack of Jerusalem and the subjection of the Israelites by the 'wulfheort' (wolf-hearted one, 116), the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>65</sup> Following this conquest, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of the violent end of every empire and every human pleasure (104–20), the meaning of which is patiently explained by the enslaved prophet Daniel, and ignored by the Babylonian king, who instead builds an immense golden statue for his subjects to worship. Further compounding his sins, Nebuchadnezzar then attempts to immolate three virtuous youths who refuse to worship his idol, though they are protected from

64 Lucas argued that the compilation of Junius 11 probably began at around the turn of the first millennium, with the later addition of *Christ and Satan* being made in the first quarter of the eleventh century. More recently this view has been challenged by Leslie Lockett, who writes that a number of features require 'special pleading' if they are to be dated outside of the range c. 960–990. See *Exodus*, ed. by Lucas, p. 1; Lockett, 'An Integrated Re-examination', pp. 172–73.

65 For a more detailed consideration of the relationship between urban places and kingship is explored in *Daniel*, see Bintley, 'Where the Wild Things Are', pp. 215–21.



the flames through divine intervention. Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, of a great tree representative of himself and his empire, which is subsequently felled and has its stump bound, is again patiently explained by Daniel. The king ignores the prophet entirely, interpreting his great city as proof of God's favour:

Ongan ða gyddigan þurh gylp micel  
 Caldea cyning þa he ceastergeweorc,  
 Babilone burh, on his blæde geseah,  
 Sennera feld sidne bewindan,  
 heah hlifigan; þæt se heretyma  
 werede geworhte þurh wundor micel,  
 wearð ða anhydig ofer ealle men,  
 swiðmod in sefan, for ðære sundorgife  
 þe him god sealde.

[Then the Chaldean king began to boast with great arrogance, when in his prosperity he looked upon the fortress, the city of Babylon, broadly stretching about the plain of Shinar, and towering tall; the warrior king had built it as a great wonder for the multitude, and become stubborn over all men, proud in spirit, as a result of the privilege that God had granted him.]

(*Daniel* 598–606)

The author of *Daniel* was not particularly concerned with describing Babylon in terms that would evoke a recognisable city in a recognisable landscape; Babylon is not portrayed in terms which invite us to seek its counterpart in the British landscape. On the contrary, its Near Eastern distance is emphasized by the otherness of the names and place names with which it is associated: Chaldea, Babylon, and Shinar.<sup>66</sup>

Robert Finnegan has noted that the *Daniel* poet's Babylon, rather than representing a recognisable settlement or stronghold, instead 'serves as a focal point for and reflects the spiritual condition of its citizens'.<sup>67</sup> Whilst Finnegan suggests that while the 'happiness' of Babylon's *burhsittend* depends on this spiritual condition, up to and including their 'right to hold the city', it is also notable that the poet emphasizes the responsibility of a king like Nebuchadnezzar to act as a moral guide for his people.<sup>68</sup> Leaving the urban characteristics of the poem aside, one of its most important messages could have been easily understood by audiences throughout the early Middle Ages, namely the duty of a king to ensure his people's righteousness by guiding them appropriately. The king himself, after all, is the one who undergoes the greatest hardship in the poem, as a result of his rejection of the God of the Israelites.

66 As Nicole Discenza has demonstrated, this strategy of identifying places by name was part of a concerted effort to make them familiar to audiences of Old English poetry; see Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, pp. 56–101.

67 Finnegan, 'The Old English *Daniel*', p. 204.

68 Finnegan, 'The Old English *Daniel*', p. 204.

The Babylonians themselves do not suffer. His punishment is seven years of bestial madness, at the end of which he eventually recognises the sovereignty of God and is redeemed:

Seofon winter samod susl þrowode,  
 wildeora westen, winburge cyning.  
 Ða se earfoðmæg up locode,  
 wilddeora gewita, þurh wolcna gang.  
 Gemunde þa on mode þæt metod wære,  
 heofona heahcyning, hæleða bearnum  
 ana ece gast.

[For seven years altogether the king of the festive city suffered misery, and the wastes of wild beasts. Then that suffering one looked up, the intellectual equal of the wild beasts, through the parting of the clouds. He then remembered in his mind that the creator, the high king of the heavens, was the sole and eternal spirit for the sons of men.]

(*Daniel* 620–26)

The city of Babylon is not manifestly a realm of evil deeds like Mermedonia, but then as Augustine explains in *De Civitate Dei*, neither was Rome when its inhabitants worshipped pagan gods. Nebuchadnezzar is responsible for this evil, and it is fitting that it he is the one to suffer divine retribution. Significantly, God maintains the city of Babylon throughout his madness, so that when Nebuchadnezzar *does* return to his metropolis, it has not fallen into ruin.

Siððan deora gesið,  
 wildra wærgenga, of waðe cwom,  
 Nabochodonossor of niðwracum,  
 siððan weardode wide rice,  
 heold hæleða gestreon and þa hean burh,  
 frod, foremihtig folca ræswa,  
 Caldea cyning, oðþæt him cwelm gesceod,  
 swa him ofer eorðan andsaca ne wæs  
 gumena ænig oðþæt him god wolde  
 þurh hryre hreddan hea rice.

[After the companion of wild beasts, and the friend of the savage ones — Nebuchadnezzar — returned from his wandering, from his severe punishments, he afterwards governed the wide kingdom, watched over the public purse and that high city, as a wise and mighty leader of the people, the king of the Chaldeans, until death destroyed him, so that no man on earth was an adversary to him, until God wished to relieve him of that high kingdom in death.]

(*Daniel* 661–70)

When Nebuchadnezzar eventually recognises God, the city over which he holds power can also be considered reformed. Notably, Nebuchadnezzar is not the only one to suffer this fate in *Daniel*. Babylon's defeat by the Persians years later is attributed to the vanity of his son Belshazzar, in an episode where the young king is described as a 'burga aldor' (lord of cities, 676), who 'weold wera rices, oðþæt him wlenco gesceod' (wielded the power of empire until fate destroyed him, 677). At Belshazzar's final feast in Babylon, during which his boasting attracts the attention of a vengeful God, an angelic hand traces out the writing on the wall revealing the doom of the young king and his people (712–23). The poem closes with the prophet Daniel's interpretation of the message sent by God (six chapters before its conclusion in the Scripture), during which he admonishes Belshazzar for celebrating the downfall of the Israelites by drinking out of golden vessels stolen from Jerusalem, and for his ignorance in denying the God who had humbled his father.

The points that have been made so far in this chapter are relatively straightforward. Works like *Judith* can, on at least one level, be understood in the light of a set of historical circumstances in the late-Saxon period, during which the burhs were of particular strategic importance. Like *Judith*, Cynewulf's poems *Elene* and *Juliana*, and the *Daniel* of the Junius Manuscript, also have their own heroes, villains, and urban settlements. However, the walls, streets, and buildings of these places do not appear in these three poems in the same way that they do in *Judith*, as a tangible aspect of their settings. The role of city-strongholds in the narrative is far more closely aligned with the identity of powerful individuals, and they serve various roles reflecting the augmentation (or diminution) of temporal power and spiritual grace, whether acting as a metaphor for the souls of individuals, or as an illustration of the Augustinian opposition between the cities of man and God. All three of these aspects are naturally closely related and co-dependent. Thus, in *Elene*, Constantine and his mother Helena's influence over Rome, Jerusalem, and other unnamed cities, exemplifies both their great power on earth and the moral obligation that this power entails. The fates of Maximian and Eleusius in *Juliana*, both of whom hold power over cities and citizens, yet whose main interest seems to be the persecution of Christians, serve as a warning concerning the abuse of authority. Satan and Juliana's contrasting portrayals of the human soul, as a fortress and a home respectively, encapsulate some of the ideas that Cynewulf is trying to convey in these poems about the relationship between an individual's moral interior and the exterior with which they perform good or evil deeds. *Daniel*, although it is not Cynewulf's work, conveys a similar message and provides excellent examples of individuals living at both extremes. When he defies God, and leads the people of Babylon into sin, Nebuchadnezzar is punished in a manner appropriate to his moral failings. Accepting God, and offering the Babylonians the opportunity for redemption, he is rewarded with sanity once again. Therefore, whilst these works do not reflect the appearance of these towns and cities in the landscape, they nevertheless rely on an implicit understanding of how these settlements operated within networks of people, power, and place.

## Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Building of Christendom

At around the turn of the first millennium, Ælfric and Wulfstan of York both composed homilies showing clear interest in the relationship between human bodies and architecture, both as dwelling places for the soul, and as building materials to be utilised in the construction of the universal Church.<sup>69</sup> The second half of this chapter will demonstrate how Ælfric and Wulfstan applied this symbolism in their homilies, before going on to show how these works built on traditions that had been established by Bede in the eighth century, commandeered by Alfred in the ninth, and were given a new lease of life by these homilists at the turn of the first millennium.

In the closing lines of Ælfric's first series homily for Palm Sunday, which has been dated to the final decade of the tenth century, he writes that:<sup>70</sup>

Se lichama þe is þære saule reaf, anbidað þæs miclan domes and þeah he beo to duste formolsnod, god hine arærð, and gebrincð togædere saule and lichaman to ðam ecan lif, and bið þonne gefylled cristes behat.<sup>71</sup>

[The body, which is the vestment of the soul, awaits the last judgement, and although it crumbles to dust, God himself raises it up, and brings together the soul and the body, to the eternal life, and thus is Christ's promise fulfilled.]

The apparent sense here is not that of body-as-building, as it appears in *Juliana*, but rather of the flesh as a kind of garment. However, these lines seem to draw on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, in which the body is described as 'terrestris domus nostra' (our earthly home), the destruction of which is no concern because of the eternal home that will replace it after death.<sup>72</sup> Paul writes that:

Nam et qui sumus in tabernaculo ingemescimus gravati eo quod nolumus expoliari sed supervestiri ut absorbeatur quod mortale est a vita.<sup>73</sup>

[For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.]

The connection with Paul here suggests that the body in Ælfric's homily should be understood not solely a 'garment', but as a tent — a temporary structure that we occupy in the wilderness of the present life, and the tabernacle that precedes the heavenly temple. In this light, the body can be thought of as both a garment of flesh, and as a temporary building.

69 Johnson, 'The Ruin as Body-City Riddle', pp. 398–400. As Jon Wilcox notes, these homilies imply an audience of both layfolk and clerics; see Wilcox, 'Ælfric in Dorset', p. 54.

70 Gatch dates both series of homilies to between 989–992 in Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 12–15.

71 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 290–98 (lines 215–18).

72 2 Corinthians 5. 1. A similar idea also appears in 2 Peter 1. 13 as a description of the temporal body, and also at the beginning of *Guthlac A*.

73 2 Corinthians 5. 4.

Although, in this instance, Ælfric seems to be thinking of the body less as a 'house', and more as a tabernacle, references to the relationship between human beings and more permanent structures can be found elsewhere in his works.<sup>74</sup> Individuals, for Ælfric, were not only to think of their bodies as the dwelling place of the soul, but also as building blocks of the universal Church. His second series homily *In dedicatione ecclesiae* draws upon a similar idea when referring to the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 21. 42), in which Christ (referring in turn to Psalm 118) tells his disciples that 'the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner', prophesying his own crucifixion and symbolic function as the spiritual foundation of the Church. Ælfric writes that 'Crist is se lybbenda stan þone awurpon ða ungeleaffullan iudei' (Christ is the living stone that the unbelieving Jews cast away), 'þe us eall gehylt' (who supports us all); 'He is se grundweall þære gastlican cyrcan' (He is the foundation of the holy Church).<sup>75</sup> Ælfric draws on Matthew again elsewhere to explain the role of Simon Peter in the foundation of the Church, taking the opportunity to reiterate Jesus' pun on the Greek name *petros* which he assigned to Simon Peter, and the Greek for rock, *petra*:<sup>76</sup>

Drihten cwæð to petre, 'þu eart stænen', for þære strençþe his geleafan and for anrædnysse his andetnysse he underfeng þone naman.<sup>77</sup>

[The Lord said to Peter, 'you are the rock', and because of his belief in his strength and acknowledgement of his resolution he received that name.]

Further reference to the same passage appears in Ælfric's second series homily for the mass celebrating the feast of Saint Peter the Apostle:

Crist cwæð to him, betwux oðrum wordum, 'Ic secge ðe þu eart petrus, and ofer ðisne stan ic getimbrige mine cyrcan' [...] Ær ðan fyrste wæs his nama Simon, ac drihten him gesette þisne naman Petrus, þæt is stænen.<sup>78</sup>

[Christ said to him, amongst other words, 'I say that you are Peter, and on this rock I shall build my Church' [...] Before then his name was Simon, but the Lord gave him the name Peter, which means rock.]

74 In John 2. 21, for instance, Christ says that he could destroy the temple of Jerusalem and rebuild it within three days, in a reference to his own body and the resurrection. Paul reiterates this idea in 1 Corinthians 6. 19, calling the body a temple on this occasion rather than a vestment or tent.

75 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 335–45 (lines 93–94, 130–31, 229). The same motif also appears elsewhere in Ælfric's homilies; Christ is similarly described as the *gastlican stan* ('holy stone') that gave Moses water in the desert; see Ælfric's homily for *Dominica in Media Quadragesime*, in Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 110–26 (lines 215–20). Christ is again described as the *grundweal* of the Church in his homily on the *Passio Petri et Pauli*; see Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 388–99 (lines 64–71). See discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 96–97.

76 Matthew 16. 18.

77 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 388–99 (lines 60–61).

78 *In Festiuitate Sancti Petri Apostoli, III. Kalendas Iulii*, in Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 221–29 (lines 161–67).

Ælfric goes on to explain the extended significance of this metaphor, that ‘eal cristen folc [ ... ] eart stænen’ (all Christian people [ ... ] are stones, 168–69) from which the Church is built. The same idea is also important in his *In dedicatione ecclesiae* homily, where the members of the congregation are appealed to as ‘ða liflican stanas þe beoð ofer criste getimbrode on gastlicum husum’ (the living stones which are built up over Christ as a spiritual home, 108–09). The righteous bear the weight of one another just as the stones of the ‘eorðlicere cyrcan lið stan ofer stane, and ælc berð oþerne’ (earthly church lie stone upon stone, and each bears up the other, 125–26).<sup>79</sup> The rich symbolic vocabulary of Ælfric’s homilies indicates that the Church at his time keenly embraced biblical metaphors which required that congregations of his time should think of themselves as the stones of both *a* church and *the* Church.<sup>80</sup>

Ælfric also makes explicit reference elsewhere to humans as trees, closely following biblical precedent, as well as what may have been pre-Christian Insular traditions connecting human beings and plant-life analogous to those found in Old Norse literature.<sup>81</sup> Ælfric’s second series homily for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost is a particularly interesting example of this, as here he discusses the sins and virtues of people in terms of the produce of trees.<sup>82</sup> The homily functions, like Alfred’s preface to Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, by describing humans as trees and their produce as good and evil deeds, drawing directly upon the Sermon on the Mount:<sup>83</sup>

Ne mæg þæt gode treow wyrcan yfele wæstmas, ne þæt yfele treow gode wæstmas;  
 Ælc treow þe ne wyrð godne wæstm bið forcorfen and on fyre aworpen.

[The good tree may not produce evil fruits, nor the evil tree good produce.  
 Each tree that does not give good produce is cut down and cast into the fire.]<sup>84</sup>

Ælfric goes on to ask:

Hwa gaderað æfre winberian of ðornum. Oþþe ficæppla of bremelum? Hwa mæg  
 æfre of leahterfullum mannum oððe of ðwyrum ænige godnysse gegaderian? Be  
 ðisum ðornum and bremelum cwæð se ælmihtiga god to adame æfter ðan ðe he  
 of ðan forbodenan treowe ðigde.

79 This same metaphor appears elsewhere in Ælfric’s homilies to refer to good Christians as walls of humility, and — conversely — the wicked as the scattered stones of a fallen temple. See *Dominica XII Post Pentecosten*, in Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 249–54 (lines 76–82); and *Dominica Undecima Post Pentecosten*, in Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. by Clemoes, pp. 410–17 (lines 17–27).

80 Morris, ‘Local Churches in the Anglo-Saxon Countryside’, p. 185.

81 See discussion in Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*, and Bintley, ‘Plant Life in the Poetic Edda’.

82 Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, pp. 235–40.

83 Matthew 7. 16–20.

84 Ælfric, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, p. 235 (lines 7–10); these words are repeated in a similar form on p. 237 (lines 60–61, 70–71).

[Who ever gathers grapes from thorns, or figs from brambles? What goodness may ever be gathered from sinful or depraved men? Of these thorns and brambles Almighty God spoke to Adam after he ate from the forbidden tree.]<sup>85</sup>

This description of human beings as trees does not present them as a source of timber, but as a source of fruit, and so differs from the description of people as stones found in the dedication homily. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering the context in which this homily is likely to have been received. Although many churches were built in stone, many were not, or — like Greenstead in Essex — also made substantial use of timber.<sup>86</sup> Equally, churches that were predominantly stone-built would nevertheless have had timber roof structures. The physical fabric of both churches and the Church, as Bede had written in *De Templo*, was made up of both of these materials.

Wulfstan, who drew on Ælfric in his works, employed the same ideas in similar contexts. Patrick Wormald, who dated Wulfstan's homily *De dedicatione ecclesiae* to 1020, thought it may have been delivered in person at the dedication of Cnut's 'battle church' at Ashingdon.<sup>87</sup> Here, Wulfstan offers a more obvious example of the way in which a human body can be understood as a dwelling place for God:

And soþ is þæt ic secge, miclum fremed se him sylfum þe Gode to lofe cyrcan gegearwað. And ealra getimbra huru is Gode gecwemast þæt se man hine sylfne getimbrige to ðam þingum þæt he sylf sy gecweme hus and God licwurde on to wunianne [ ... ] Se gegearwað Gode licwyrde hus on him sylfum se þe anrædlice and rihtlice God lufað, and se hine lufað rihtlice se þe his bebodu gehealt, and simble geornlicest ymbe þæt smeað, hu he Gode fyrrest gecweman mæge; and witodlice on þam þe swa deð, God wunað and eardað.<sup>88</sup>

[And true is that which I say: a great thing does he who for love of God prepares himself as a church. And all that is done is indeed pleasing to God that that man does in order to make himself a pleasing house, and comfortable for God to dwell in [ ... ] He prepares for God a pleasing home within himself who resolutely and rightly loves God, and he truly loves Him who obeys His commands, and is continually diligent in meditation about how he may especially please God; and truly, in those who do so, God lives and abides.]

There is a subtle but notable difference between this homily and Ælfric's description of the body as the garment or tent of the soul in his first Palm Sunday homily, as a direct consequence of their ultimate source: Ælfric draws on 2 Corinthians 5.1–5, and Wulfstan upon 1 Corinthians 3.10–17. In the case of the latter, the emphasis is not on the body as a vessel to bear the soul, but as a temple within which the righteous prepare a fitting dwelling for the presence of God.<sup>89</sup> Fundamental to both church-dedication

85 Ælfric, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Godden, p. 236 (lines 42–46).

86 Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, I, pp. 262–64.

87 Wulfstan's presence on this occasion is attested by Anglo-Saxon Chronicle manuscripts C and D; see Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', p. 13.

88 Wulfstan, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum, pp. 246–50 (lines 74–78, 86–90).

89 1 Corinthians 3. 10–17.



homilies, whether or not they treat the body more or less explicitly as a building, is the emphasis on Christ's role as their foundation, and thus the way in which each individual serves as part of the fabric of the Church.

Although the emphasis of these homilies is upon the spiritual, it is also important to bear in mind the contexts from which they emerged, and what they would have meant to those present at the dedication of churches in the period c. 990–1020, in light of those traditions discussed in earlier chapters. As Pauline Stafford has outlined, the relationship between the Church and secular administration at this time (much of which fell within the reign of Æthelred), was extremely close, as both 'had as a prime aim the ordering of society according to the divine model'.<sup>90</sup> It is unsurprising that Ælfric devoted particular attention to the role of kings in his works, whilst Wulfstan's enthusiasm for law-making was particularly valuable in managing transitions of power — a quality that was extremely valuable to Cnut.<sup>91</sup> 'Few kings gained by public disorder', as Lawson has observed, and Cnut would have been keen to 'pacify a country disturbed by years of warfare'.<sup>92</sup> Whether or not one thinks of Ælfric as having been bookish, in contrast with Dorothy Whitelock's 'veteran archbishop' Wulfstan, 'engaged in multifarious activities' both before and after the Danish conquest, both were equally concerned with the temporal and eternal concerns of England and its people.<sup>93</sup> The call for congregations within these newly-established bastions of faith to consider their relationship with both the church building in which they stood in body, and the universal Church in which they stood in spirit, was not one from which it is easy to separate conceptions of the temporal kingdom presided over by earthly kings, whether they were English, Danish, or something in between. In either case, the people and the Church were also an integral part of the functional, secular workings of human society, with a divinely ordained role to play in its defence and maintenance.

This is how these homilies are likely to have been understood at the turn of the first millennium, in keeping with the other works considered so far which endeavoured to maintain close ties between the Church and secular institutions, and to transmit these ideas to the general populace, whether directly through poetry and other vernacular works, or indirectly via Latin texts. This is only natural, given their reliance upon existing Insular traditions, as well as those more obviously exegetical. As Chapter 2 argued, Wulfstan had drawn on Gildas' account of the destruction of the cities of Britain elsewhere, employing this narrative to warn the English of their potential fate in the face of foreign invasions.<sup>94</sup> Considering these dedication homilies with Gildas in mind, the scattered stones of the Romano-British cities act as a potent

90 Stafford, 'Church and Society in the Age of Aelfric', p. 18.

91 Hill describes the kingdom taken over by Cnut as possessing a 'complex and efficient urban network, provided by a royal initiative over a century before'; see Hill, 'An Urban Policy for Cnut?', p. 101.

92 Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', pp. 160–61. On Cnut's careful management of his image, and the importance he placed on maintaining the impression of continuity between himself and his predecessors, see discussion in Thomson, 'Configuring Stasis'.

93 Whitelock, 'Wulfstan's Authorship of Cnut's Laws', p. 81.

94 See discussion, pp. 39–41.

metaphor for the destruction of their Church, and the collapse of their people and civilization — as a necessary result of their failure in faith. Bede imported Gildas' narrative into his story of English origins, in which the return of Christianity played a central role in the reclamation of the urban places that had been forfeited by the British. In Chapter 3 we saw how both his historical and religious works convey a clear impression of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical institutions, the human components of which are described as the timber and stone building materials of the Temple. Chapter 4 showed how the Alfredian administration and its successors attempted to cultivate similar ideas in the ninth century. Within this schema a balance of secular and religious interests were required to support programmes of translation, military reform, and the construction of fortified settlements, each as constituent parts of a coherent whole. When Ælfric and Wulfstan took their place as inheritors of this legacy in the late tenth century, they did so with an understanding of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical institutions, both of which occupied them in one way or another. However, in these works they were more obviously interested in the endurance of the Church and the salvation of Christian souls than the heads that wore crowns. It is thus fitting that their homilies on the dedication of churches, which call for their congregations to consider themselves as houses and temples for God and the soul, and as building blocks of the universal Church, are in keeping with long-established traditions that drew explicit links between the buildings in which people lived and worshipped, their immortal souls and physical bodies, and the role that all of these had to play in the edification of Christian society.

### The Anglo-Norman City in *Durham*

Representations of settlements in the vernacular come to an abrupt end in the eleventh century with the Norman Conquest. Despite this, there is one well-read Old English poem from Anglo-Norman England in which the uncommon representation of an urban settlement offers some insight into the way that these places were conceptualised after the Conquest. This is the *Durham* poem that is 'usually dated on internal evidence to between 1104 and 1109', and thus the reign of Henry I, William's youngest son.<sup>95</sup> This view has recently been challenged by Thomas O'Donnell, who argues that a date of composition 'between 1050 and 1083 much better reflects the evidence of the poem's transmission', following challenges by Heather Blurton and

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95 Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 176. Dobbie noted that the *terminus ante quem* of the latter work is established by the poem's own reference to the relics of St Cuthbert, which were not moved to Durham until 1104, whilst a *terminus post quem* of 1109 is provided by a reference to the poem itself in Symeon's *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*. Text from *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, pp. xliii–xlv; Crépin, 'Bede and the Vernacular', p. 186. See also discussion of *Durham* and its landscape in Appleton, 'The Old English *Durham* and the Cult of Cuthbert'.

Joseph Grossi to the interpretation of *Durham* as a work of nostalgia.<sup>96</sup> O'Donnell's dating of the poem, as he writes, 'depends largely on a close reading' of Symeon of Durham's *Libellus de exordio*.<sup>97</sup> In addition to favouring an eleventh-century date for the poem on linguistic grounds (that would benefit from further explication), O'Donnell makes a claim for reference to the poem by the medieval priory 'as though it were a "primitive" Durham text from before their time', and reads the poem's description of relics *æt ðem eadige* (Cuthbert) as being 'with' or 'beside' the saint rather than near him, in accordance with the arrangement of the relics in the pre-Conquest church.<sup>98</sup> Though the linguistic evidence is not discussed, and the reading of *æt* in this way is no smoking gun, the point O'Donnell makes about Symeon's use of the poem to confirm the provenance of Bede's relics is sound. There is, I would agree, an appeal to the authority of the English text, but no appeal to its supposed antiquity, or acknowledgement of the arrangement of relics in the poem being different to their arrangement in the church contemporary to the Latin text (the church to which Symeon *does* refer). I would suggest that for Symeon the authority of the poem lies in the supposition that it represents an English tradition concerning English saints.

As Margaret Schlauch noted, *Durham* is the only extant example in the early English vernacular of the *encomium urbis*, a literary form of rhetoric dating to ancient times that catalogued various aspects of a city.<sup>99</sup> Although derivative in certain respects, Tom Shippey has observed that the poem 'nevertheless contains some remarkable and unexpected features' which show the poet's familiarity with the literary traditions of Old English verse, 'and that even at this late date he was trying to deliberately echo them'.<sup>100</sup> The first eight lines of the poem are of particular relevance:

Is ðeos burch breome geond Breotenrice,  
 steppa gestaðolad, stanas ymbutan  
 wundrum gewæxen. Weor ymbeornad,  
 ea yðum stronge, and ðer inne wunað  
 feola fisca kyn on floda gemonge.  
 And ðær gewexen is wudafæstern micel;  
 wuniad in ðem wycum wilda deor monige,  
 in deope dalum deora ungerim.<sup>101</sup>

[This city is famous throughout Britain, established on steep slopes and wondrously grown up with stones all about. There runs past it a strong flowing

96 O'Donnell, 'The Old English *Durham*', p. 131; Blurton, 'Reliquia: Writing Relics in Anglo-Norman Durham'; Grossi, 'Preserving the Future'.

97 O'Donnell, 'The Old English *Durham*', p. 136.

98 O'Donnell, 'The Old English *Durham*', p. 140.

99 Schlauch, 'An Old English *encomium urbis*'; noted in, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, p. xlv. Dobbie also notes the existence of a long Latin poem by Alcuin, written c. 780–782, 'in praise of the city and church of York' (p. xlv); see also Abram, 'In Search of Lost Time', p. 27; and Kendall, 'Let Us Now Praise a Famous City', pp. 507–08.

100 Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 176.

101 *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Dobbie, p. 27.

river, enclosed by weirs; there dwell therein many kinds of fish in that teeming flood; also there has grown up a great woodfastness. In that place dwell many wild beasts in the deep dales, countless creatures.]

(*Durham* 1–8)

Immediately noticeable is the emphasis on the fame of the *burch* throughout Britain — Britain, rather than *Englaland*, or any such equivalent, thus marking a distinction between the old world of English rule and that of its Norman inheritors. This also, however, gives the clear impression that Durham is one of the foremost towns within a wider network including not only lands within the roughly defined borders of ‘England’, but also those further afield — perhaps including those elsewhere on the island that Norman kings aspired to rule.

However, these lines self-consciously focus on the landscape that supports the town, and offer insights that are demonstrably indebted to the various traditions discussed in earlier chapters. The position of the town on steep slopes raises it up in the mind’s eye as a place that is elevated, secure, and formidable in a purely practical military sense. There is more to it than this however, and the established tradition of representing individuals as stones in the building of the Church suggests that Durham’s strength lies not just in its physical construction, but also in the wealth of individuals responsible for its material, social, and ecclesiastical edification. Durham’s development is not, despite this, depicted as the result of building in the manner of laying stone upon stone, but rather as growth, being ‘wundrum gewæxen’ (wondrously grown up).<sup>102</sup> This offers an unusually organic impression of the growth of a city, the verb ‘weaxan’ (to wax, grow) being used elsewhere to describe the increase of heroes such as Scyld Scefing (*Beowulf* 8). The ‘waxing’ of the city’s wondrous stones is comparable with those elements of the ‘natural’ world which have contributed to both its prosperity and protection. There is both the fast-flowing river, whose many fish would provide a valuable source of food, and a ‘wudafæstern micel’ (great wood-fastness). Though Modern English has no direct equivalent for this word, Baker has noted that *fæsten*, used here in conjunction with *wuda*, is a term that seems to have been used in ‘almost metaphorical’ fashion to refer to a range of places that could potentially function as strongholds for various reasons, owing to their natural properties.<sup>103</sup>

The poem thus presents environmental features and those of human construction as equal partners in the reinforcement of the city, in a way that is altogether surprising and unique in the context of the settlements discussed throughout the course of this book. Durham is clearly a far cry from the wreckage of the Romano-British city described in *The Ruin*; it is a place at peace with the world outside its walls, rather than an *opus contra naturam*, and qualifies in its own right, as Catherine Clarke has noted, as a *locus amoenus* complete with forests and flowing waters.<sup>104</sup> The stronghold that appears here does not seem to be particularly dominated by construction from either

102 See also discussion in Atherton, “‘Sudden Wonder’”, p. 77.

103 John Baker, ‘Old English *fæsten*’, p. 341.

104 Clarke, ‘Envelope Pattern’.

wood or stone, but sits at a comfortable point of balance between the two. Its stone construction is certainly reminiscent of Roman buildings, both of the kind whose rubble litters the elegies, and whose walls encompass places of Christian community in *Andreas* and *Judith*. Simultaneously, its relationship with the 'natural' world lends it the same sense of tranquillity that is familiar from those works which celebrate rural landscapes. Perhaps, rather than marking a distinction between England as it was, and England as it had been, the poet was celebrating a link with the cities of the past, whilst also paving the way forward. If so, *Durham* may mark the beginning of a new 'Anglo-Norman' urban identity, as much as it heralds the end of a consciously 'Anglo-Saxon' proto-urban identity. By the same token, it might also have been seen by others as part of the assertion of English identity within a complex new ethnic, linguistic, and cultural setting.

At around the same time that *Durham* was written by an anonymous English author, a poet who was clearly well versed in the Old English poetic tradition as well as a broader European intellectual milieu, similar sentiments were being echoed on the other side of the Channel by the Anglo-Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis (c. 1075–1142), albeit concerning the city of Rouen. Orderic's description of Rouen in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* offers a valuable point of comparison with *Durham* for various reasons, not the least of which being that Orderic was of English and Norman parentage. Orderic spent his early years in Shropshire before joining the Abbey of Saint-Evroult in Normandy at the age of eleven, though he was to visit England again in 1105, when he toured places including Worcester and Crowland.<sup>105</sup> Orderic began writing his *Historia* probably at some point between 1110 and 1115, when he had the following to say about the origins of the city of Rouen and its current situation:

Rodomensis ciuitas populis est ac negotiorum commerciis opulentissima, portus quoque confluentia, et riuorum murmure ac pratorum amoenitate iocundissima. fructuum et piscium cunctarumque rerum exuberantia ditissima, montibus et siluis undique circumdata, muris at uallis et propugnaculis ualidissima, moeniis et ædificiis domorum ac basilicarum pulcherrima.<sup>106</sup>

[Rouen is a populous and wealthy city, thronged with merchants and a meeting-place of trade routes. A fair city set among murmuring streams and smiling meadows, abounding in fruit and fish and all manner of produce, it stands surrounding by hills and woods, strongly encircled by walls and ramparts and battlements, and fair to behold with its mansions and houses and churches.]

The terms used here to describe Rouen follow the same course as those used to describe Durham; Rouen is wealthy and populous, a hubbub of mercantile activity. Durham is famed throughout Britain — a splendid city established on steep slopes (a holy mountain?) and well appointed with stones that echo the building blocks of

<sup>105</sup> Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, pp. 3–16, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. by Chibnall, III, Books V and VI, pp. 36–37.

the Church, to use the words of Wulfstan, Ælfric, Bede, and others. Both also are also situated in the midst of prosperous natural surroundings, and both have waterways filled with fish, and fields, forests, and deep dales that are abundant in produce and/or wild animals.<sup>107</sup>

I make no suggestion whatsoever that Orderic was responsible for penning *Durham* during a working holiday in England, despite the obvious similarities between these texts. What we can see at work here is far more interesting. Whilst *Durham* is unlike the ruins of the Exeter Book elegies, the paradisaical depiction of the city as a *locus amoenus* is not far from those descriptions of idyllic places that are found elsewhere in the same manuscript, in works like *The Phoenix*. In essence, *Durham* offers us a happy marriage between the *locus amoenus* tradition, and ideas about urban places as divine strongholds which are likely to have emerged from the ninth century onwards, when these places had begun to take on a vitally important new role in the defence of the landscape. What it also confirms is that by this point in time, authors of late Old English literature were engaging with the conventions of the wider European literary milieu when they sought to represent the fledgling cities of Anglo-Norman England, and that ideas about settlements had already entered a new phase in the course of their vibrant and complex lives.

In this final chapter we have seen how the settlements and strongholds of England took on a new significance in the tenth and eleventh centuries, in tandem with signs of an increasingly urbanised landscape of defensible and more densely occupied towns. There is good evidence from the literature of this period to indicate the continuity and development of ideas that date back to at least the time of Bede, and which we have also seen in works of the ninth century. Fortified settlements of the kind that appear in *Judith* are presented as places of powerful Christian community; in this poem they offer refuge, but also a position of strength from which to wage war. Elsewhere, the moral responsibility of rulers for the occupants of their towns and cities is a recurrent theme. The vanity of Nebuchadnezzar, in *Daniel*, sees him oscillate between righteous and unrighteous behaviour, coercing the people of Babylon into idol worship and personally suffering the consequences, before repentance brings him back to God and the helm of his kingdom. In *Daniel*, the good works of Constantine and Helena similarly extend to those in their power throughout the Roman world, as does the tyranny and sinfulness of Maximian and Eleusius in *Juliana*. Homilies written at around the turn of the first millennium, in the same fashion as earlier works, emphasize the importance of individuals' contributions to the stability of the English Church and the late-Saxon state. This was conceived of in terms that drew upon a long-established scriptural and literary discourse wherein individuals were seen both as dwelling places for the soul, and for God, but also as the building blocks of the eternal Church.

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107 I am grateful to Leonie Hicks for drawing my attention to this passage. See further discussion in Hicks, 'Through the City Streets'.





## Afterword

### Of Time and the City

In his description of the Roman shore fort at Richborough in his *Britannia* of 1586, first translated from Latin in 1610, William Camden remarked that:

... age has eras'd the very track of it ; and to teach us that Cities die as well as Men, it is at this day a corn-field, wherein, when the corn is grown up, one may observe the draughts of Streets crossing one another, (for where they have gone, the corn is thinner,) and such crossings they commonly call there, S. Augustine's Cross. Nothing now remains, but some ruinous walls of a square tower, cemented with a sort of sand, extremely binding.<sup>1</sup>

The stories of the places in which people lived and died in early medieval England were as complex and vibrant as those of their inhabitants. Some were dramatic and ostentatious, commanding attention, whilst others demanded little recognition, but were essential to the daily lives of people at all levels of society. Some left standing remains, and others only shadows in the earth. Some were elevated in the imaginations of those who wrote literature, histories, and religious texts, and others were passed over in silence. More often, they were a balance of all these things, and many more besides. There is an abundance of evidence from the period that reveals how narratives were manufactured and attached to various places, and *types* of places. Over the course of centuries these narratives, categories, and types shifted and developed considerably, in parallel with the complex and shifting matrices of meaning articulated through place names, dialects, architectural traditions, art styles, burial rites, religious beliefs, scribal hands, and so on.

In *Trees in the Religions of Early Medieval England*, following the approaches of John Blair and Éamonn Ó Carragáin,<sup>2</sup> I argued that trees and woodland, as a focus of pre-Christian belief in early medieval England, offered a conventional bridge for the conversion to Christianity, a religious tradition already rich in vegetative and arboreal symbolism. This transition benefitted from attitudes to trees and woodland that were culturally embedded on multiple levels. In the present work I have ploughed a parallel furrow by arguing for a deeper connection between the forms and functions

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1 Camden, *Britannia*, I, p. 246. I am grateful to Lesley Hardy for drawing my attention to this description.

2 Bintley, *Trees in the Religions*; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*.

of settlements 'on the ground', and in the parallel movements in textual culture that emerged from the same cultural contexts. I have argued that traditions and narratives manufactured in literature and through other texts had a direct impact on the ways in which people thought about and interacted with the places they inhabited, avoided, passed through, or otherwise encountered in their environment.

When discussing texts which emerge from long-term traditions such as these, which relied on structural, typological, and literary formulae to varying extents, we should be more prepared to think about how these texts might have been read in different ways, and at different times, and have had different effects upon different sorts of groups of peoples. Literary scholars are often adept at discussing the filiation of ideas, the circulation of manuscripts, and the influence of schools of thought under the influence of significant thinkers and movements, but are more cautious when it comes to thinking about how changes outside of the scriptorium influenced the production and reception of these texts. Within these relationships, we must also be aware of the feedback loops between material and textual culture that perpetuated certain ideas, for better or for worse, reinforcing cultural norms and expectations, and moulding environments which naturally privileged the aims of those who had power over the production and circulation of the written word.

To understand the impact of a work like *Beowulf*, if it is an eighth-century text, it is also valuable to think about its audiences in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, and how changes to the built environment would have altered the context of its reception. Whilst a work may have had a specific point of origin, and have been written with particular landscapes in mind, when it comes to works as anonymous and timeless as many early English poems, their relevance to multiple contexts should be taken into consideration. There are then both benefits and drawbacks to thinking about texts as representing places at particular times. It is important, in discussing the value of the interactions between literature and its environments, to bear in mind that the environments of the early medieval world, built or otherwise, could be subject to just as much change and development as works of literature and textual traditions. To make an obvious point, in this respect some scholarly approaches may be at odds with the nature of the evidence, partially as a result of the way in which we are encouraged to frame research questions and approaches, and to identify pivotal moments, processes, and events. Whilst we may be inclined, for various reasons, to suggest that some historical figures, periods, and forms of evidence are more significant than others, few are unaware that the sources of evidence we examine form part of a wider continuum, complicated by various factors. Monocausal explanations inevitably simplify our understanding of the various relationships between actants operating as part of any set of processes.

In my discussion of the relationship between texts and the materiality of settlements I have acknowledged the fact that these works were produced in elite contexts, and principally for the benefit of those elites in one way or another. As works which advanced and reinforced aspects of elite ideology, this naturally raises questions about how these ideas were disseminated more broadly. We do not know the extent to which works like *Andreas* or *Judith* were in popular circulation, and even though poetry written for performance may have reached wider audiences, works like the ninth/

tenth-century prose translations will have had fewer listeners, and even fewer readers. However, I would suggest that greater credence should be given to the possibility that although these works are not likely to have been familiar to all, it is entirely likely that the narratives and ideas they contained *were* — potentially through the same societal channels that enabled laws to be promulgated, large-scale building projects to be undertaken, and men to be mustered for war. These texts may have had elite origins, in other words, but the assumption that the labouring classes did not have a literary culture, nor one that was responsive and related to elite literary culture, seems untenable. Cædmon was an agricultural worker; his sense of the cosmos and his place within it was just as keen as that of his masters.

In writing this book, I have suggested that works of literature and other forms of writing played a significant role in the coercive processes that encouraged groups of people to build and occupy different forms of settlements at different points in time. In particular, I have claimed that new attitudes towards towns may have been fostered in this way, and that works of literature may have contributed to the ‘social enterprise’ of urban planning, evidence of which we have seen in works including *Andreas*, *Judith*, and *Juliana*. In some respects this is hardly a novel claim, though it is difficult to demonstrate with any certainty, and much harder to prove. Historical figures like Offa and Charlemagne were capable of mobilising large numbers of people to undertake huge infrastructure projects, and legendary kings like Hrothgar are described as marshalling people from far and wide to build his hall. ‘Free’ peoples of various kinds, not to mention those who were enslaved, found themselves coerced or compelled in this way. An important question to ask is whether those who sought to undertake such projects would not have used every means at their disposal to motivate their subjects, including retelling the stories of exemplary figures from hagiography and Scripture. Hrothgar summons Heorot into being through his words, displaying a godlike power to command those at potential risk from his violence, whilst Asser has his complaints about those who failed to carry out Alfred’s wishes. It is more likely than not that any king who valued the power of words as much as Alfred would have used them in the way they appear in contemporary literature, as a means of binding collectivities and communities together to suit his ends, as securely as formal oaths or twisted gold.

## Earth, Wood, and Stone

There are, then, benefits to recognizing literary works as products both of textual traditions and material environments that have a variety of further implications. In literary study texts are often dislocated from their material contexts, in part because of assumptions that are made about their authorship, accessibility, and literary filiation. This can lead to overdue weight being placed on the dominance of textual traditions when it comes to discussing the relationship between texts and their sources. From one extreme perspective, early (and later) medieval texts were a patchwork of references to Biblical and Classical texts, overburdened by generic conventions, commonplaces, formulaic descriptions, and familiar motifs. However, even if we were to maintain

a standpoint this caricatured, this should not prevent us looking beyond Gildas' use of Jeremiah, or any other author's use of Virgil (for instance) to reflect on the relationship between their textual environment and the material environment that shaped their use and borrowing of these traditions. To assume that the authors of these works were quoting purely to demonstrate parallels between situations, knowledge of the Scriptures, or Classical Antiquity, is to misrepresent their work. When Swift, Wordsworth, or Eliot wrote about the city of London, they knew many of the same Biblical and Classical texts. Nevertheless, cities and other environments, real and unreal, had an equally important part to play in shaping their poetry.

This book's discussion of the relationships between the 'Alfredian' translations, the Burghal Hidage document, and the landscape of late ninth and tenth-century England is a case in point. Those responsible for the creation of these texts, whether they were translations, adaptations, or something in between, are highly likely to have been involved in other innovations as part of public life, such as the development of planned settlements, economic affairs, and military organization. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the Wulfstan who wrote the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* was the same Wulfstan who was involved in writing laws and managing practical affairs. For this reason, when approaching these texts critically, we should do so with awareness of the multiple concerns of their authors and the contexts that produced their works, regardless of our preconceptions concerning whether or not they are literature, and to be treated as 'literary' works (like the translation of Boethius' *Consolation*), or as practical, legal texts, like the Burghal Hidage document. There is great value in reading these texts from multiple perspectives; those who saw divine harmony and order in all things will have had a different sense of the Hidage document to those who read it solely as a set of practical instructions.<sup>3</sup> Equally, those who valued the explanation offered by the Old English *Consolation* for the origins and consequences of evil may have been more fond of its reassuring maxims than its encouragement to reflection and contemplation. The truth is likely to lie somewhere between. These texts reflect a broad spectrum of human experience, knowledge, and understanding, and their authors and readers participated in multiple artificially and arbitrarily divided spheres of life to different degrees, as do we. We do a disservice to the past by assuming that approaches to the evidence in the present day, often defined by trends in scholarship, reflect the ways in which people living in the past thought about the world around them.

Thinking along similar lines, in terms of the separation between present and past, this book has also attempted to ask questions about how building materials were understood in the early Middle Ages. There is some evidence that these materials, when incorporated into buildings, were not thought of as commodities divorced from their point of origin, but instead as reasssemblages of the environment that produced them, retaining many of their natural properties. Early medieval texts suggest a much closer relationship to the origins of these materials than is familiar to

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3 We might remember here, for example, the complexity of the philosophical machinery brought to bear on the division of Thomas' fart between the friars in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*.

many modern readers in the developed west, who live insulated and centrally heated lives in buildings whose construction methods are largely alien to them. For those accustomed to seeing their homes not as commodities, but as places for community built from raw materials taken from the environment around them, the experience was different; the precarious lives of buildings, like those of human bodies, were far more apparent to those accustomed to seeing them rot and burn.

Perhaps for this reason, amongst others, there may also have been a less than solid sense of the separation between the built environment and the environment of the surrounding world. Our familiarity with the written record, and our knowledge of the intense hardships of agricultural life in early medieval Europe, have revealed a great deal about the realities of subsistence farming. There may be still more to understand about the relationship between the fragility of this existence and the early medieval experience of the built environment. The absence of some settlement forms from the written record suggests that everyday structures had a lighter footprint in the mind than will be familiar to most modern westerners; this may be doubly significant given Blair's recent suggestions concerning the equally light structural footprint of much medieval architecture. Both raise questions about the way in which we consider the im/permanence of building materials and styles, and the way in which scholarly understanding of settlements and their architecture has been shaped by the inheritance of the Classical tradition.

## Structures of Community

Settlements and buildings in medieval texts are frequently represented through the experience of communal life, and the works discussed in these pages are no exception, revealing a relationship between the two that extended far beyond the well-known symbolism of the hall. Buildings, whether as physical structures in settlements, or as symbolic social constructs, offered a means of understanding and articulating the organization of society, the relationship between groups of people, the management of sacred and secular space, and how authority and hierarchy operated within these various constructs. One clear theme that has emerged, perhaps unsurprisingly, is the part that ideas promoted by the Church had to play in determining how settlements and strongholds were understood, and in particular the influence of Augustine of Hippo's writings on broader contemporary understanding of the world of the past, present, and future. This has various possible implications, one of which concerns our understanding of the relationship between settlements and strongholds in early medieval texts and in the Bible, both in terms of typology and time. Medieval texts, and the present moment of the medieval reader (and modern, for that matter), sit between the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, on the one hand, and the Book of Revelation on the other. Thus the image of the city, temple, tent, farm, and so on operate on a temporal continuum that, taking the city as an example, would mean it resonated with places as widespread in human historical time as Enoch, Nineveh, Sodom, Babylon, Bethulia, Jerusalem, Rome, Athens, Carthage (etc.), and the Heavenly Jerusalem of the time to come. We should expect to find cities described in terms

that echo the forms of these places in the Biblical and Classical tradition not simply as a consequence of this literary inheritance, but because they were the inheritors of these places and precursors to the coming of the City of God.

This Augustinian ordering of the world, both in Augustine's works, and channelled through those of Bede (and others), contributed variously to the representation of settlements and strongholds and their perceived relationship with their inhabitants. It found expression in Bede's Temple as a means of articulating an idealised relationship between individuals and the ordering of Church and society. This understanding, explicit in his exegetical work, and implicit in his historical writing, offered a conceptual blueprint for others that functioned equally well in more practical contexts. As I have suggested, the same broad understanding of the relationship between individuals, society, hierarchy, and settlements is equally apparent in works of the ninth and tenth centuries. In these contexts, in parallel with the entrenchment, retrenchment, and development of systems of military, economic, political, and ecclesiastical organization, it provided both an intellectual and practical means of ordering peoples, polities, and kingdoms. Although the extent to which this was conscious is difficult to unpick, works such as the preface to the *Soliloquies* and the interpolations in the Old English *Consolation* suggest conscious reflection on these same ideas by contemporary elites.

In discussing 'structures of community', one significant discontinuity between the textual and material record that I have sought to address is between the idea and the reality of the 'hall'. Although this is an important and central image in early medieval texts, recent work has drawn attention to the absence of large-scale buildings matching the descriptions of Heorot (as quintessential hall) from the archaeological record between the second half of the seventh century and c. 900.<sup>4</sup> I have suggested that understandings of the 'hall' should not be limited by our fixed imagining of what a hall *should* have looked like. Kings' halls need not have been constructed on the same scale as the buildings at Yeavering, especially if they were serving different social and political functions later in the period. What may matter more is that the concept of the hall remained constant, rather than the structure itself, *despite* the changes that these physical structures underwent. The 'hall' where Offa did business may not, in many ways, have resembled Edwin's. To assume that it did would be to apply the same reasoning that has frustrated our search for the origins of villages and towns. We may be expecting halls in Offan Mercia to look a bit too much like Northumbrian buildings from a century earlier, and there is no reason this should necessarily have been the case — they could well have embodied the same symbolism, albeit in a different form.

I have also suggested that the symbolic significance of the hall may have been broader and deeper than has previously been understood, and wide enough to have accommodated a range of meanings in various different contexts. One of these is the cosmic image of the hall as the dominion of God. The cosmos, as it appears both in *Cædmon's Hymn* and in other works, is a roofed structure, paralleling the comparison between the building of a roofed hall and the building of the universe in Bede's commentary on Genesis. The image of hall-as-cosmos is echoed in the description

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<sup>4</sup> See discussion, pp. 83–91.



of Heorot in *Beowulf*, similarly summoned into being through the word of Hrothgar, and where his word structures relationships internally (within his kingdom), and externally (in his dealings with other peoples). Within the increasingly formalised structures of power and hierarchy that emerged in early medieval England, this conception of power, authority, and its relationship with the cultural orthodoxy of the hall (as prominent a figure in *The Battle of Maldon* (c. 991) as in any work) may suggest that the significance of the symbolic hall extended much further into the intellectual structures of early medieval society, offering a framework for the relationship between the Lord, lords, and the lords below them. In this sense, the hall functioned in contemporary ideology as a structuring principle defined by and defining all of those practices which supported it.

Power of this kind engendered a corresponding set of responsibilities. This much is clear from those works of Bede, Ælfric, and Wulfstan, who use the closely related image of the Church as a structure created from individuals. These responsibilities are ultimately spiritual, but the relationship between the spiritual and the mundane is indivisible until the separation of soul and body. The spiritual communities fostered on earth are the building blocks of the Church, and the City of God, and thus power and control over settlements and the people within them entails a significant degree of moral responsibility. Juliana's words to the people of Nicomedia shortly before her state-sanctioned murder make plain the gap in understanding between the governor, motivated by lust and rejection of her ethical principles, and the people she is addressing. Earlier in the poem, when Satan describes his attacks on individuals, he describes them as solitary towers facing armed assault. Juliana, when she speaks to the people of Nicomedia, undermines this militaristic rhetoric by addressing them in terms that are domestic and familiar, and not as towers, but as houses — the structuring form that represents domesticity and the family.

The presence and absence of certain kinds of settlements and strongholds from texts has been discussed throughout this book. Further research on vernacular prose, Anglo-Latin, and visual arts will doubtless shed more light in dark corners. I would also suggest, however, that some kinds of settlements may have been overlooked (by myself and others) because of the assumption that they should appear in particular forms, or be described in particular ways. As we have seen in the case of the major maritime and riverine trading settlements of the mid-Saxon period, the reasons why they prove elusive in texts may be because they were comfortably accommodated within pre-existing conceptions of settlements and settlement organization. Likewise, the apparent absence of high-status rural settlements (or indeed rural settlements described in any great detail), may be because they were already represented, in part, using the more general symbolic language used to describe rural landscapes.

The symbolic 'hall', as a structuring image, reached far beyond wattles and wooden walls. As Alfred Siewers has argued, its symbolism also served a colonizing function that was connected with the imperial pretensions of early medieval England — a drive to reoccupy the spaces Rome had vacated.<sup>5</sup> The impacts of this are writ large in

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5 Siewers, 'Landscapes of Conversion.'



*Andreas*, through the reclamation of the city, and in *Judith*, where the city becomes a weapon in the hands of this urban ideology. These intellectually colonized landscapes form part and parcel of traditions which have elevated the city to the pinnacle of civilization, and — ironically — led to the centrality of urban environments to the final chapters of this book. If, as I have argued, the significance of the hall and the city was transferrable to all kinds of settlements, this presents an interesting paradox. By lending the symbolism of hall and city to other places, these same symbols have also eclipsed them entirely.

These speculations may invite a more radical review of the assumptions and expectations we have when searching for familiar patterns from the Classical tradition (or later medieval literature) which had not been inherited, had not *yet* been inherited, or had yet to make an impact on texts. The study of early medieval settlements in various contexts might benefit from a greater plurality of perspectives concerning settlement types. The terminology used to describe these places in texts is often applied so broadly that it is practically useless for the purposes of scholars seeking to approach them in a straightforward fashion. This must, at the very least, reflect the fluidity of the way in which these terms were applied in various *contemporary* contexts. These ideas were also influenced by knowledge of settlements outside of the Insular world, either directly, or through the experiences of traders, pilgrims, and other travellers. Importantly, many of those who are most likely to have written and copied texts were also amongst the most likely to have travelled to places such as Rome. Especially well travelled, if the narrator of *Widsith* is anything to go by, were poets themselves — those who moved from court to court, trading in the wealth of words — as well as myriad others whose experiences contributed to the intellectual makeup of early medieval society.

To an extent, this reflects the usual difficulties that one encounters when attempting to access any culturally distant people and seeking to understand their relationships with the places they inhabited using terms that are familiar to us. When both the fog of time and the patchy nature of the evidence are thrown into this mix, the picture becomes even more complex. A less conscious error, related to the problems Molyneaux has described when it comes to writing about early medieval 'England', is the baggage of nationalism and empire that comes with writing — in the case of the 'Anglo-Saxons' — about a people who may appear more proximate and familiar than they really are. For those living in Britain, and speaking and writing in English, the kind of immediate access this offers to the landscapes, place names, and material culture of the past can be a false friend. Whilst it presents various opportunities to approach the period through its language, material culture, and so on, the silence of the dead can too often lead us to assume that we know them better than we do, and for them to shoulder the burden of our narratives, whether or not we pass them on consciously. In this context, we should be especially mindful of intellectually colonizing a past world very different to our own and encumbering it with our expectations of what its settlements looked like, and how they were understood by their inhabitants.

How far did these ideas travel? They were the product of a wide variety of influences, many of which there has not been room to discuss in any great detail. The concepts discussed in these pages were shaped in numerous ways by readers, writers, builders,

architects, kings, bishops, and countless others who were never named or identified, and they circulated throughout Britain, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the places to which these regions were connected. Their appearance in England at this time, and the way in which they were shaped and proved influential there, creating new readings whose influence extended beyond the Conquest, contributed in turn to wider European interpretations of the places where people lived out their lives, and by extension the wider global culture of those who have experienced the impact of these ideas.

This study aims to open up multiple areas for future research that are intended to extend beyond straightforward criticism or refinement of the ideas I have proposed. Our understanding of settlements and landscapes can only ever be enriched by a better appreciation of what these places meant to the people who lived within them, and only impoverished by dismissing what they had to say as unreflective of material or historical evidence. Nuanced approaches must often be taken in understanding what this evidence reveals, but its complexity, or even its obscurity, should not dissuade us from attempting to unpick its threads. Every text and object has something to tell us, and its own language in which this is communicated. Hopefully this book will encourage readers not only to number, weigh, and divide the arguments found herein, but also to appreciate the benefits of adopting similar approaches — reading settlements as works written not only in script or soil, but in the vast and shifting web of meanings that bound and entangled them across time, space, and place.



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